

**“THE CHIEFEST WEALTH OF OUR COUNTRY”:
THE FOLDCOURSE IN EAST ANGLIA**

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A Thesis Submitted in Fulfilment of
the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
at the University of East Anglia
in the School of History

Word count: 98,470

2015

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Abstract

This thesis will examine why the foldcourse, which is usually seen as a regional version of sheep-corn husbandry, was apparently confined to East Anglia. It will explore the foldcourse through its complex interactions with the environment, social structures and agrarian practices of the region and use these factors to establish the pre-conditions for the presence or absence of the foldcourse. The manorial right to a foldcourse was not ‘automatic’, and in a number of multi-manorial townships there was a connection between the possession of a foldcourse and Domesday estates. In the medieval period, the foldcourse and individual free folds co-existed in a diverse system that evolved into one under more direct manorial control in the sixteenth century - a period in which the term foldcourse became more widely and loosely used. The foldcourse remained, however, essentially an ‘individualistic’ rather than communal regime throughout its lifespan with only the minimal necessary communal activity.

The foldcourse was, rather than a form of sheep-corn husbandry, intimately connected with infield-outfield agriculture which was widespread across the light soil regions of East Anglia. Thus, foldcourse rights, as opposed to shack, were often confined to the outfield (which itself operated under a variety of names), as was the ‘compensation’ or provision of exchange lands by manorial lords. The cropping regimes employed in the light soil regions commonly involved significant periods of extended fallowing of both infield and outfield arable; the purpose of which was to improve the soil structure and thereby the retention of nutrients and moisture, and for the development of better plant cover and improved grazing for the flocks. On some Norfolk estates, this combination of foldcourse, variable infield-outfield cropping regimes with extended fallowing developed, during the early-modern period, into an improved and flexible form of open-field agriculture.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to all of the staff at the University of East Anglia who have helped me in the production of this thesis. I would like to thank, in particular, Dr Adam Longcroft and the staff of the former, and excellent, Centre of Continuing Education who first got me started on this long journey. In the School of History, I would like to thank Dr Rob Liddiard, and Professor Mark Bailey for their advice, Dr Jon Gregory and Dr Lucy Ryder for their advice and, more particularly, help with GIS, and Mrs Elizabeth Rutledge for her considerable assistance in my struggles with Latin. Lastly, but certainly not least, I would like to thank Professor Tom Williamson for his encouragement, guidance and the questioning and challenges that he set without which this would have been a much poorer thesis.

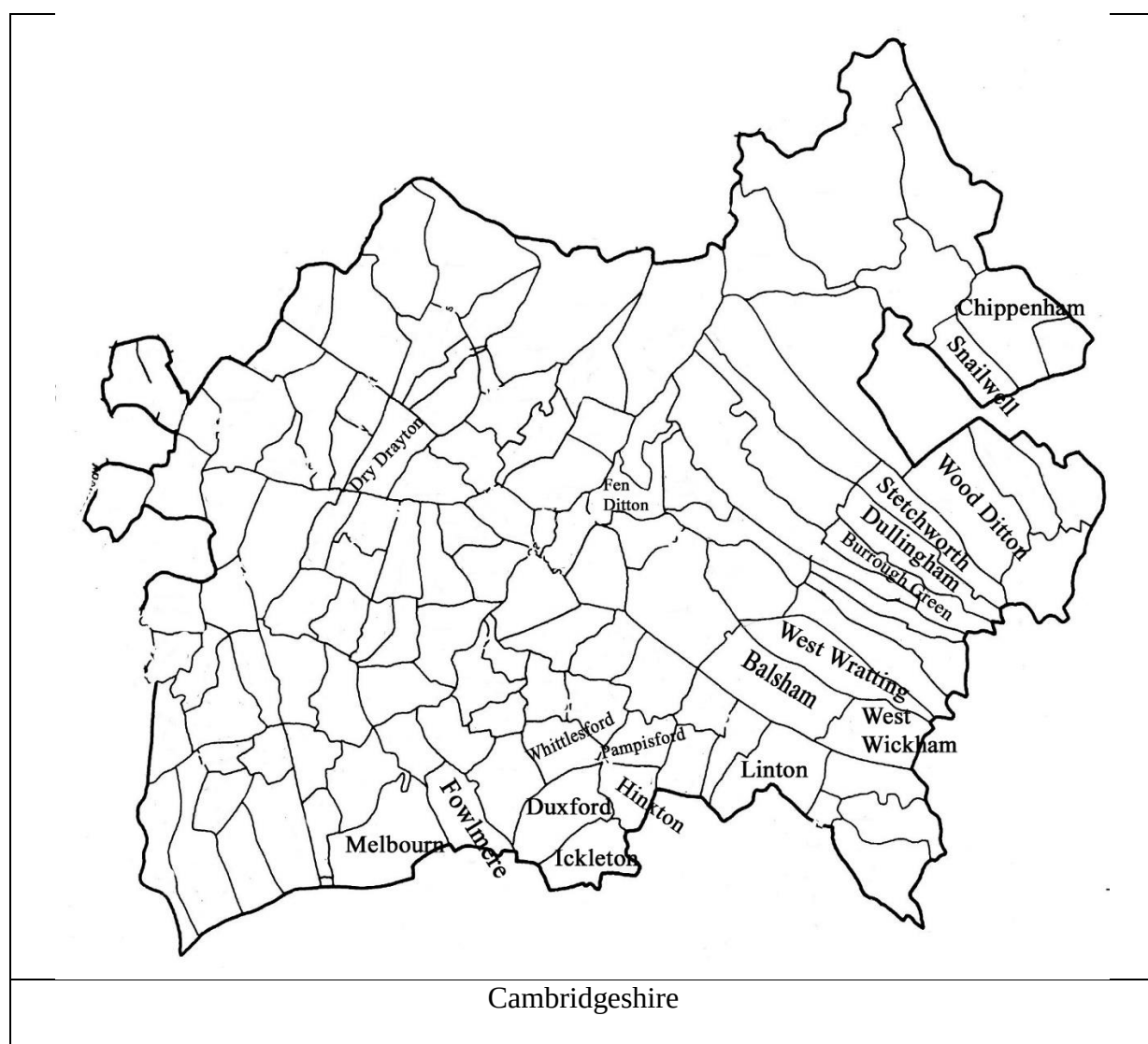
I would like to thank the staff at Cambridge University Library, the Millenium Library, Norwich and the various Record Offices that I visited, for their always helpful advice - particularly the Norfolk Record Office where it began to feel that I was taking up residence. Furthermore, I would like to thank John Ebbage at Natural England for his helpful discussion on heathland, Julian Bell, the curator of the Downland and Weald Museum for his advice on the size of sheep hurdles, and Dr Brendan Chester-Kadwell, who was a considerable source of help and comment at our regular Red Lion seminars.

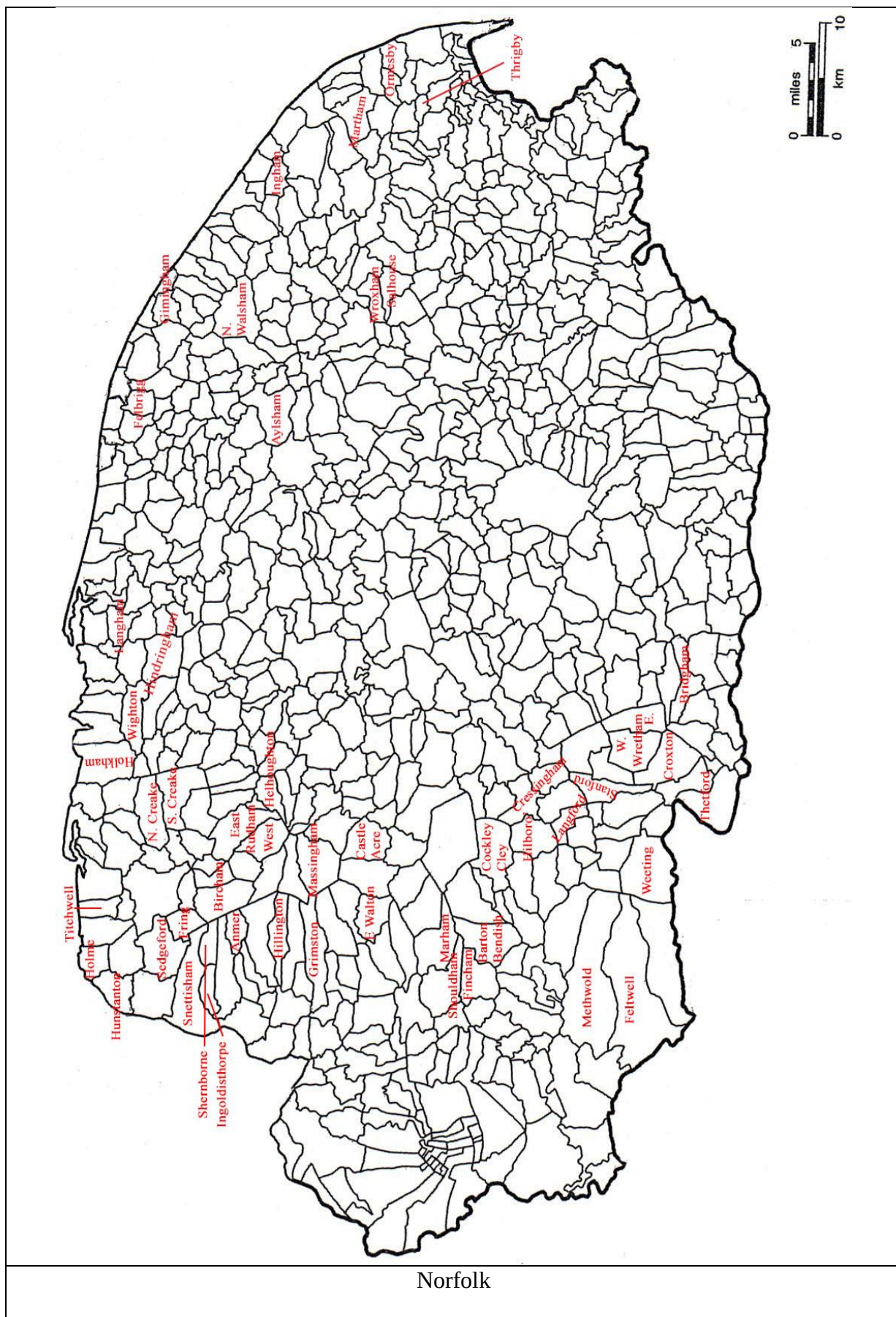
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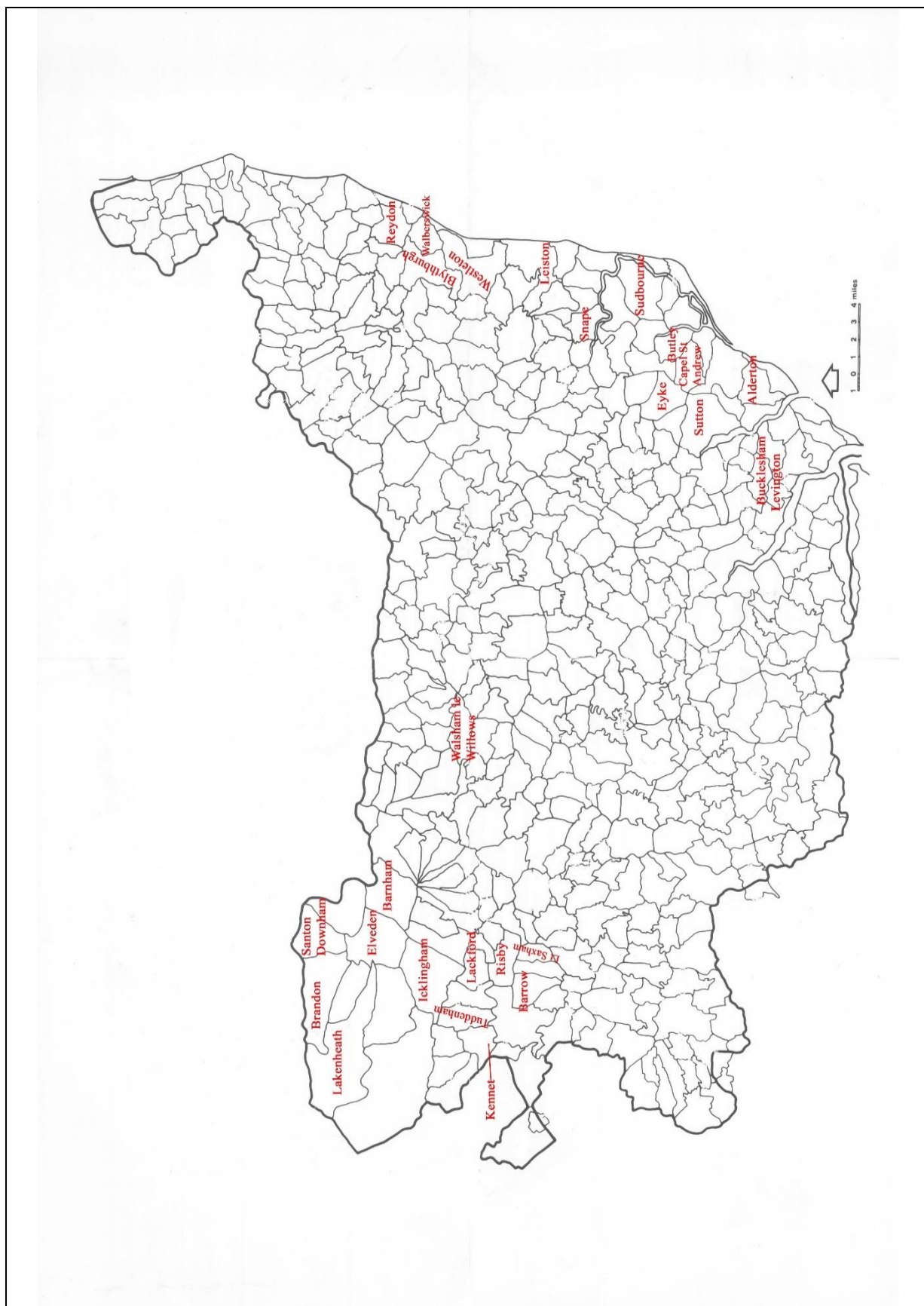
ABBREVIATIONS

AHEW	Agrarian History of England and Wales
CRO	Cambridge Record Office
EAA	East Anglian Archaeology
ERO	Essex Record Office
GIS	Geographic Information Systems
ha	hectares
km	kilometres
NA	National Archives
NRO	Norfolk Record Office
OED	Oxford English Dictionary
SROB	Suffolk Record Office, Bury St Edmunds
SROL	Suffolk Record Office, Lowestoft
UEA	University of East Anglia

Maps of the counties of Cambridgeshire, Norfolk and Suffolk Showing the Locations of the Parishes Discussed in the Thesis







Suffolk

CHAPTER 1: THE HISTORIOGRAPHY OF THE FOLDCOURSE

1. INTRODUCTION

I will begin with a picture (Fig 1) that highlights two important elements of this thesis and of the foldcourse. One is explicit and is the illustration itself of a small flock of sheep folded in hurdles; the fold being one of the predominant mechanisms for the maintenance of soil fertility for many centuries. The second is implicit and is the source of the illustration, which is that most high status of medieval objects – the Luttrell Psalter – for lordship, and the actions of manorial lords, was significant in the history of the foldcourse. The psalter was made, in the first half of the fourteenth century, for Sir Geoffrey Luttrell who held several estates; the largest of which was the manor of Irnham where his flock was one of the major sources of his income.¹ Irnham is situated on the heathlands south of Lincoln a region where sheep-corn husbandry (of which the foldcourse was one version) was an important agrarian regime.²



Fig 1: Illustration of Sheep Fold³

¹ Camille, M., *Mirror in Parchment*, London, (1998), 9, 178, 217

² Robinson, D., 'Natural Regions', *Historical Atlas of Lincolnshire*, ed Bennett, N., Bennett, S., Chichester, (2001), 8

³ The British Library, Add. 42130, f163v

The foldcourse was an East Anglian institution that has long been the subject of discussion for both its agrarian and social importance. In essence, the foldcourse consisted of two components. The first was large flocks of sheep that grazed the heaths by day and were folded on the arable lands at night in order to fertilise them with their dung; the second was the control exercised by manorial lords, whose sheep also dominated the flock.⁴ It was the activities of some foldcourse owners in the early modern period that led to many disputes between lords and tenants and was one of the underlying causes of Kett's rebellion.⁵

The foldcourse was, furthermore, also an institution of both long duration and complexity; and one that was responsive to changes in the agrarian and economic environment around it – hence its longevity. The complexity arose from a number of aspects: the manorial control exercised over the foldcourse; the manorial complexity of most townships; the varying agrarian regimes that developed as a response to the relative poverty of local soils; and the interaction between all these aspects. My predominant focus in this thesis – as indicated by the title - is the agrarian role of the foldcourse, and the integration of farming regimes with the foldcourse. More simply, I want to try and understand how, within all of the complexity, the foldcourse worked in practice.

This opening chapter on the historiography of the foldcourse is in six sections and the focus is – as it has been for many authors - the late medieval and early modern foldcourse. The first section examines the foldcourse itself and the second the nature of the economic and agrarian changes that underlay the development of the foldcourse. The third section will present several definitions of the foldcourse and offer some contemporary views of the institution and its components. The fourth part provides an overview of the social impacts of the foldcourse and other agrarian changes, and the final section sets out a summary of the arguments and discussions that I intend to address and an outline of the structure of the succeeding chapters.

⁴ Wade Martins, S. Williamson, T., *Roots of Change*, Exeter, (1999), 11

⁵ Wood, A., *The 1549 Rebellions and the Making of Early Modern England*, Cambridge, (2007), 56

2. THE HISTORIOGRAPHY OF THE FOLDCOURSE

The first modern description of the agrarian practice known as the foldcourse was provided by Allison and, as the title of his article makes clear, he saw it as a localised version of “sheep-corn husbandry” thinking that the two terms were, as they applied to Norfolk at least, synonymous.⁶ Sheep-corn husbandry was widespread in lowland England and a staple of both medieval and early modern agriculture.⁷ It was confined to the light soil regions and consisted, in essence, of a cycle whereby sheep were fed by day on hill pastures and heaths and at night folded on the arable fields in order to manure them and maintain their fertility.⁸ Thirsk’s “tentative map” of farming regions for the period 1500-1640, characterised the downlands and wolds of counties such as Sussex, Wiltshire, Yorkshire and Lincolnshire as areas of sheep-corn husbandry, together with the heathlands of west Norfolk and breckland.⁹

The fold, was not, however, the only source of manure to maintain fertility. An important further source was the farmyard manures and household wastes of settlements. The household material included ceramic ware, that when mixed into the manures left material evidence in the soil; recoverable by field walking, for archaeological analysis.¹⁰ Carting farmyard waste to the fields and spreading it was both labour intensive and time consuming; and, not surprisingly, the distribution usually indicates a decline with distance from the source of the pottery sherds.¹¹

Allison’s description of the foldcourse focussed primarily on the sixteenth century, a period characterised by Bailey as the ‘classic foldcourse’.¹² Allison identified a number of key components. The first of which was the existence of large flocks of sheep with which to dung the light soils and thus maintain their fertility; and, in order to provide the flock with pasture throughout the year, the availability of open arable fields and extensive heaths and commons.¹³ These two elements were common to all forms of sheep-corn husbandry and it is in the final two components in Allison’s description that the separate nature of the foldcourse lies. These

⁶ Allison, K. J., ‘The Sheep-Corn Husbandry of Norfolk in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries’, *Agric Hist Review*, 5 (1957), 14.

⁷ Campbell, B. M. S., *English Seigniorial Agriculture 1250-1450*, Cambridge, (2000), 177; Kerridge, E., *The Sheepfold in Wiltshire*, 282

⁸ Thirsk, J., *England’s Agricultural Regions and Agrarian History, 1500-1750*, Basingstoke, (1987), 13

⁹ *Ibid* 28, 38, 47.

¹⁰ Jones, R., ‘Signatures in the Soil: The Use of Pottery in Manure Scatters in the Identification of Medieval Arable Farming Regimes’, *Archaeological Journal*, 161:1, (2004), 162

¹¹ *Ibid*, 171

¹² Bailey, M., ‘Sand into Gold: The Evolution of the Foldcourse System in west Suffolk, 1200-1600’, *Agric Hist Review*, 38.1, (1990), 41

¹³ Allison, *Sheep-corn Husbandry*, 16, 13

were: that sheep farming was predominantly the concern of the manorial lord or his lessees; and that the demesne flocks fed not only on the demesne land but also over the holdings of the lord's tenants.¹⁴

Following on from Allison's account a number of other authors have tried to define a foldcourse. For Bailey it was "the exclusive right to erect a sheep-fold over a carefully defined area of ground", with a single village often possessing a number of such courses.¹⁵ He subsequently refined that definition to restrict the right to the areas of fallow in the open fields.¹⁶ Kerridge broke the foldcourse down into four elements: the fold itself; a flock with faldage rights (which he defined as the right to fold other men's sheep in the demesne fold); a sheepwalk in severalty; and the right to feed the flock on the common fields.¹⁷

From these initial descriptions one can identify a number of separate, but inter-related, elements that make up the operation of the foldcourse, and will be discussed in the next section. The first is the role and input of manorial lords, and the manorial structures in those areas where the foldcourse was in operation. The second is the geographical extent of the foldcourse within East Anglia and its spatial distribution. Thirdly, there is the interaction of the foldcourse with the nature and layout of the open fields and pastures, and the consequent complexities this caused. Finally, there is the interaction of the agrarian regime of which the foldcourse was a component with changes caused by economic developments involving both landlords and tenants.

¹⁴ Ibid, 15

¹⁵ Bailey, M., *A Marginal Economy?* Cambridge, (1989), 65

¹⁶ Bailey, *Sand into Gold*, 41.

¹⁷ Kerridge, E., *The Common Fields of England*, Manchester, (1992), 81

2.1 The Components of the Foldcourse

Lordship

It is in the involvement and role of the manorial lord that the foldcourse differs most noticeably from the generality of sheep-corn husbandry. As Simpson expressed it, the ‘peculiarity’ of the foldcourse is the position of the manorial lord, whereby only he or his lessee had the right to maintain a fold.¹⁸ Elsewhere, in the “Midland system” for example, with its small numbers of large open fields each devoted to one section of the crop regime including the fallow, the rights of pasture were “inherited in the whole community” and used by all landholders.¹⁹ Similarly, in most sheep-corn regions communal control of the pasture was the norm. However, in East Anglia all of a township’s grazing was usually the prerogative of the manorial lord irrespective of who was occupying the land.²⁰ As a consequence of this the demesne flocks could feed on both demesne land and that occupied by the tenants.²¹ Campbell comments how unusual it was for the control of the pasture to reside in this way in the hands of the manorial lord.²² Such control over the foldcourse is also exceptional when compared to the prevailing view of East Anglia as a region where, given “the freedom of its tenants [and] the restricted scope of arbitrary constraints”, agrarian development “was outstanding...for its commercialism and economic individualism”.²³

The second significant aspect of manorial involvement is that many Norfolk villis contained more than one manor.²⁴ The arable lands and pastures of the vill were therefore divided between, and held by, the various manors, and the foldcourse became the mechanism by which the rights of those manors regarding the feeding grounds of their respective flocks were physically delineated. Postgate assumed that the lands were intermingled, seeing it as an impediment to enclosure in sheep-corn country, and if multiple manors in one vill were the result of the fragmentation of larger estates the result would be that the respective lands were intermingled.²⁵ In eastern Norfolk a parish might contain “any number of manors” and a manor might have land in several parishes, and the common fields also merged with those of adjacent

¹⁸ Simpson, A., ‘The East Anglian Foldcourse: Some Queries’, *Agric Hist Review*, 6 (1958), 88

¹⁹ Hall, D., *Medieval Fields*, Aylesbury, (1982), 17

²⁰ Postgate, M. R., ‘Field Systems of East Anglia’, in Baker, A. & Butlin, R., eds, *Studies of Field Systems in the British Isles*, Cambridge, (1973), 314

²¹ Allison, *Sheep-corn Husbandry*, 15

²² Campbell, B, M, S., *The Regional Uniqueness of English Field Systems? Some Evidence from Eastern Norfolk*, *Agric Hist Rev*, 29, (1981), 18

²³ Britnell, R. H., ‘Eastern England’, in *AHEW, III*, ed Miller E, Cambridge (1991), 624.

²⁴ Allison, *Sheep-corn Husbandry*, 15

²⁵ Postgate, *Field Systems*, 306

parishes.²⁶ Similar circumstances pertained elsewhere in East Anglia - for example, Bradcar manor in Shropham, on the edge of the Brecklands held land in four villis in 1299.²⁷

Open fields and Pastures

As outlined above the classic foldcourse operated within an open-field environment, supported by extensive pastures, but in a system unlike that of the Midlands. The pasture was needed to feed the flock throughout the year. In the summer the sheep usually fed off the heaths and commons, whilst in areas such as north Norfolk and the Fen edge the resources of the salt marshes and fens were also utilised. The sheep also fed on the arable at various times, depending on the crop rotation. In any one rotation the fallow was available throughout the cycle and, depending on the crop regime, the land set aside for spring sowing could, after the harvest, be pastured through the autumn and winter, whilst in the autumn, the land for winter sowing was also free until sown.²⁸ The foregoing assumes a conventional three course/three year rotation which is problematic in the context of the agrarian regimes and soils of at least some areas of western East Anglia, and ignores the role of the “brecks”, areas of heathland which were ploughed up and cropped for a few years before reverting to heath.²⁹ It is, however, in the interaction of the flock, the need for pasture and the cropping regime that some of the complexities of the regime occur.

The arable lands in most of East Anglia were laid out in a complex and variable pattern that was significantly different to those of the Midlands.³⁰ The Midland system, with its small number of large fields of similar size, under communal control, and individual holdings of the arable strips distributed across all of the township fields is still often seen as the norm.³¹ Fox saw the uniqueness of the Midland system as lying in this pattern of distribution, and in the division of the arable into fields of approximately equal size, with one field set aside each year as fallow.³² The field systems of other sheep-corn countries offer a further comparison; those on the Lincolnshire Wolds were much more akin to the Midland system than to East Anglia.

²⁶ Campbell, B. M. S., ‘The Extent and Layout of Commonfields in Eastern Norfolk’, *Norfolk Archaeology*, 28 (1981), 13

²⁷ Hudson, W., ‘Three Manorial Extents of the Thirteenth Century’, *Norfolk Archaeology*, 14 (1901), 7

²⁸ Allison, *Sheep-corn Husbandry*, 16, 17

²⁹ Bailey, *Marginal Economy*, 58

³⁰ *ibid*, 41; Postgate, *Field Systems*, 281

³¹ Williamson, T., *Shaping Medieval Landscapes*, Macclesfield, (2003), 62

³² Fox, H. S. A., ‘Approaches to the Adoption of the Midland System’, in *The Origins of Open Field Agriculture*, ed, Rowley, T., London, (1981), 65,66

Croxton, Kirmington, Ulceby and Wootton for example - four parishes on the northern chalk wolds - each had two open fields of a similar size.³³

The “Midland system” involved a threefold division: firstly, into fields, then furlongs, and finally *selions*,³⁴ that is, the individual strips. Early descriptions of the East Anglian fields suggest superficially something similar, being divided in a threefold manner (the elements being called precincts, stadia or *quarentinae*, and *pecia*), but the ways in which they were operated and managed were significantly different. The size of precincts was often highly variable within the same township, and while a township would commonly have three to nine precincts, 37 were recorded in 1612 at Great Barton in Suffolk.³⁵ In medieval Breckland precincts may not have been physically defined at all.³⁶ Precincts were not associated with any course in the crop rotation cycle and were an “arbitrary division of the cultivated land, used solely as a guide to the location of holdings”. In a similar way stadia were not equivalent to furlongs and also varied in size from less than two acres to over one hundred. The basic unit of ploughland was thus the third unit - the *pecia* - equivalent to the *selion* elsewhere - and, usually, of a similar size being one furlong in length and half acre in extent.³⁷

Field System and Crop Rotation

The crop rotation was the means by which the arable lands were laid down to individual crops. The rotation of crops or courses was, in East Anglia, commonly based on the strips or *pecia* - that is the smallest unit – and a group of these, designated to one component of the rotation, was known as a ‘shift’.³⁸ However, Britnell cautions that one should not assume that the parcels of land so designated lay together, and their “permanence depended” on how regularly the crop rotation was repeated for each parcel.³⁹ The shift was thus a group of furlongs or strips that was cropped alike each year and “no more permanent than the crop rotation itself”. Furthermore, unlike a rotation based on fields, a shift was more flexible and adaptable to changes in demand - presumably by increasing or reducing the number of *pecia* in a particular shift.⁴⁰ The creation of the shift also created blocks of land whose boundaries defined where the foldcourse flock

³³ Russell, R., *The Logic of Open Field Systems*, Lincoln, (1995), map 13

³⁴ Postgate, *Field Systems*, 290.

³⁵ Postgate, *Field Systems*, 291

³⁶ Bailey, *Marginal Economy*, 41

³⁷ Postgate, *Field Systems*, 290, 291

³⁸ *ibid*, 299.

³⁹ Britnell, *Eastern England, AHEW III*, 194, 195

⁴⁰ Bailey, *Marginal Economy*, 57

could feed and be folded in a compact fashion. Simpson viewed the shift system as the mechanism by which the manorial lord maximised the benefit to be obtained from his foldcourse within an environment of apparent “unlimited individualism”.⁴¹ Individual choice was thus replaced by the imposition of a crop rotation based on shifts. Such imposition would indicate a significant move away from the shift as envisaged by Britnell and others in the medieval period with its flexibility and ‘irregularity’.

The Midland system, by contrast, was frequently based upon the largest unit – the field. However, once one field had been set aside as fallow, the courses in the other fields could be by furlong and thus more flexible, provided that the course was in the same “season” as the field – i.e. winter or spring sown. Fox, whilst accepting that in some places the furlong was the basic unit of cropping, felt that to remove the field from the equation was “going too far” and that the field retained a “central place of the whole system”.⁴²

The Layout of the Open Fields

According to Allison, the strips held by an individual East Anglian tenant were not, as in the Midland system, distributed across all of the open fields, but situated in a more compact fashion in one area of the township’s fields.⁴³ For example, at Walsingham where in 1485 one tenant had land in 19 of the 27 stadia in East Field and in 6 out of 16 stadia in North Field but none in the 48 stadia of west Field.⁴⁴ Postgate challenged the assumptions lying behind Allison’s view of the concentration of holdings, suggesting that in parts of Breckland such arrangements did not occur. The demesne holdings of the Bishop of Ely at Feltwell in 1277, for example, were in five ‘felds’; whilst at Elveden in 1617-18, holdings were fairly evenly spread across six shifts, and tenants “have many several lands...in each and every of the six shifts and feldes”.⁴⁵ Similarly, Bailey provides a number of examples from Breckland that also appear to indicate a layout more akin to that of the Midland system.⁴⁶

Whether the individual holdings were clustered, or more widely distributed, had a number of consequences. One is that when it came to putting the fold on the lands, the degree to which

⁴¹ Simpson, *The Foldcourse: Some Queries*, 88

⁴² Fox, *Adoption of Midland System*, 74

⁴³ Allison, *Sheep-corn Husbandry*, 20

⁴⁴ Postgate, *Field Systems*, 308, 309

⁴⁵ Postgate, M. R., ‘The Field Systems of Breckland’, *Agric Hist Review*, 10.2 (1962), 97

⁴⁶ Bailey, *A Marginal Economy*, 50

holdings and shifts were compact would have affected the amount of work and materials needed to separate flock from crop. Allison implies that the grouping together of holdings made the work of the cultivator easier.⁴⁷ Postgate, however, suggests that rather than the holdings of the tenants being clustered, the shift was the means by which consolidated areas of arable were achieved, “providing the necessary compact areas of fallow and stubble” for the foldcourse to operate. He also claims that the foldcourse was the main reason that the system of shifts was adopted in the first place.⁴⁸ A further consequence, as Allison saw it, of the apparent unequal distribution of tenants’ holdings was that an unequal portion of an individual tenant’s strips would inevitably lie in the fallow at some point in the cycle. In this situation, the tenant “refrained from sowing” and was normally recompensed by the foldcourse owner whose sheep would be on the fallow shift, by being offered demesne land in exchange, a reduction in rent or an increase in the number of sheep the tenant might put in the owner’s flock.⁴⁹ ‘Compensation’ is, however, not a word that one would expect to hear from a manorial lord, and, in a system such as prevailed in the Midlands, it should be noted that tenants always had a proportion of their land fallow every year.

Form and Function

Fox, discussing the Midland system uses the expressions “form and function” whilst arguing for the predominant role of the field rather than the furlong in the rotation of crops.⁵⁰ If one assumes that the ‘form’ is the layout of fields, furlongs and other units of the open field, and that the ‘function’ is the management of those ‘forms’ through the crop rotation, he is I think arguing that, in maintaining the centrality of the field in the crop rotation, the more the form is fragmented by the function (i.e. crops), the more complex and difficult to manage the system becomes. Cropping can, in theory, be at any level in response to market demand and, it is argued, flexibility comes with smaller functional elements (furlongs that are in “season” rather than fields). But there is always a balance between flexibility and complexity, particularly in managing the functional arrangements and resources in material and labour. Certainly the foldcourse, with its apparent mingling of the holdings of several manors and their foldcourses, crop rotations, and the need to separate animals from growing crops, was a complex system.

⁴⁷ Allison, *Sheep Corn Husbandry*, 20

⁴⁸ Postgate, *Field Systems*, 319

⁴⁹ Allison, *Sheep-corn Husbandry*, 20

⁵⁰ Fox, *Adoption of Midland System*, 74

Shack and Cullet rights

It was the management of the flock over the arable land that, as Allison expressed it, “demanded the closest co-operation between flock owner and tenant”, because it involved moving the fold over the unsown arable to dung it, and in the autumn over the post-harvest stubbles. Shack was the term employed for the feed available to both the flock and the tenants’ great beasts (principally horses, cows and bullocks) on the post-harvest stubbles and all tenants normally had a right of shackage during the shack period which commonly ran from Michaelmas (29th September) to the feast of the Annunciation (25th March), but which could vary depending upon weather, crops and local customs.⁵¹ In parts of medieval Breckland the shack period ran from 1st August to the 2nd February, at the end of which the grazing was restricted to the flocks of the foldcourse owners, and in some townships the lord’s flock was allowed on the stubbles before anyone else’s.⁵² Allison believed that the sheep were not folded during the shack period as there was plenty of other feed available for the animals of both the lord and the tenants.⁵³ Bailey, however, suggests that they were folded at night, and that the shack period was a bone of contention with, by the sixteenth century, landlords restricting the acreage available for grazing in order to prevent the peasants from cutting and carrying away the stubble.⁵⁴ The feeding of animals on the post-harvest stubble was not, however, specific to the foldcourse but was a common feature of most open field systems.⁵⁵

Co-operation was also required in the way that individual tenants sowed their strips – whilst these may have been clustered in restricted areas of the field, the winter corn for example had to be sown in such a manner as not to fragment the shackage, and, along with the spring sown crop, not break up the fallows on which the flock fed, and which they manured in the summer.⁵⁶ The shifts and how they were sown were thus critical to the successful management of the foldcourse - the shift being the means by which the lord obtained the “fullest use” of the foldcourse.⁵⁷

⁵¹ Allison, *Sheep-corn Husbandry*, 19

⁵² Bailey, *Marginal Economy*, 78

⁵³ Allison, *Sheep-corn Husbandry*, 19

⁵⁴ Bailey, *Marginal Economy*, 77

⁵⁵ Thirsk, J., ‘The Common Fields’, in *Peasants, Knights and Heretics*, ed Hilton R. H., Cambridge, (1976), 10

⁵⁶ Allison, *Sheep-corn Husbandry*, 20

⁵⁷ Simpson, *The Foldcourse: Some Queries*, 88.

A further element of the foldcourse was ‘cullet rights’, whereby tenants were able to put their own sheep into the lord’s flock and this ‘right’ was important in those townships where the tenants were unable to feed their sheep on the heathlands. The numbers of tenant’s sheep involved was not large – at Holkham for example, ten tenants were allowed a total of 150 sheep in the lord’s flock in 1559. Cullet sheep were looked after by the lord’s shepherd but the tenants were obliged to pay for ‘the privilege’ of their cullet ‘right’ and in some places the right was restricted to freeholders.⁵⁸ Bailey characterises the cullet not as a privilege but as something that was compulsory, and tenants had to put their animals in the lord’s flock.⁵⁹ Cullet numbers were not, however, usually restricted in medieval Breckland and communal folds were common but by the late fifteenth century, and in line with what had happened in Norfolk, as described by Allison, the numbers of sheep that a tenant could keep was being controlled.⁶⁰

Boundaries

Allison saw foldcourse boundaries as “rigidly fixed” and Bailey characterises the foldcourse as “strictly delimited”, but the surviving documents seldom indicate that the boundaries were precise.⁶¹ By its nature and quality heathland grazing was extensive.⁶² Its division was therefore unlikely to have been as comprehensive as the arable - the pastures at Brandon and Elveden for example were marked out by stones and dykes respectively.⁶³ Foldcourses were also commonly limited by the number of the sheep that they could support, controlled through manorial courts and this number one must assume relates to the pasturing element of the system, given that from the perspective of arable yield, the more animals the better.⁶⁴ The question of boundaries is further complicated by the issue of manorial complexity and the degree to which manorial lands and pastures were intermingled.

⁵⁸ Allison, *Sheep-corn Husbandry*, 21

⁵⁹ Bailey, *Marginal Economy*, 66

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 76, 294

⁶¹ Allison, *Sheep-corn Husbandry*, 17; Bailey, *Marginal Economy*, 69

⁶² *Ibid*, 54

⁶³ *Ibid*, 69

⁶⁴ *Ibid*, 70

Who Benefits?

The rationale underlying sheep-corn husbandry is the use of sheep as a means of transferring nutrients from pasture to arable to improve the latter; but, *cui bono*, as a lawyer might ask? Allison is, as Simpson puts it, ambiguous as to who received the benefit but he himself is clear: “as the sheep belong to the lord, so also does the tathe” and “he would use his flock to fertilize his own lands”.⁶⁵ How this was managed if the lands of the lord and the tenants lay intermingled is, however, not at all clear. Strictly speaking, if the tenants’ sheep were in the fold, they were not the lord’s and may have been there under sufferance or by cullet rights, and the tenants would in effect lose out in this situation, except for the benefit whilst the flock fed over their lands during the period of shack, and when it was in the fallow shift. Allison suggests that, in some townships, tenants had to pay for their lands to benefit from the lord’s flock, but only when their land lay in the fallow shift.⁶⁶ Bailey suggests that, at least in Breckland, both authors are correct and that, depending on location, demesne flocks either tathed all of the open fields or the demesne arable only.⁶⁷ It is also clear that there was a trade in manure. In 1302 an acre of tathe was valued at 12d by the demesne at Coney Weston. Purchases from individual peasants and village folds at this time also indicate a greater variation in the keeping of folds – all of which were a response to the problems of soil fertility and increased cropping demands in Breckland in the first half of the 14th century.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Simpson, *The Foldcourse: Some Queries*, 90

⁶⁶ Allison, *Sheep-corn Husbandry*, 20

⁶⁷ Bailey, *Sand into Gold*, 44

⁶⁸ Bailey, *Marginal Economy*, 208

3. AGRARIAN CHANGE AND THE FOLDCOURSE

The previous section concentrated primarily on the agrarian aspects of the ‘classic’ foldcourse and how the various elements of the system interacted. It has also, probably, given a false sense of stability, for the development of the ‘classic’ foldcourse was the result of the agrarian changes of the late medieval and early modern period. The drivers behind these changes included the moves towards growing for a market, specialisation of output and the rise of a more entrepreneurial or capitalist approach to land and labour; with their consequent social impacts such as depopulation, settlement desertion and unrest. These developments and how the foldcourse interacted with them is the subject of this section; for the period of the ‘classic’ foldcourse, in particular the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was “a crucial period” in the evolution of the institution.⁶⁹

In fifteenth-century England, following the disastrous population crash of the mid fourteenth century, land was plentiful and labour was short as a consequence of which some landlords chose to convert their land from arable to the less labour intensive pasturing of sheep or cattle. This conversion, where permanent, led in places to the shrinkage or desertion of settlements and these issues were further exacerbated by the increasingly specialised and commercialised character of the agrarian economy in the following century.⁷⁰ East Anglia was little different from the rest of the country: the decline in arable cultivation was widespread from the mid fourteenth century brought about by the same combination of lower population and increased cost of labour; but it was also however, a good time to be a tenant - in eastern England at least - with rents in general static or falling.⁷¹

The period saw, within the agrarian market, an increasing specialisation in those types of agriculture most suited to the local topography and soils, with in East Anglia an increasing focus on corn in the lighter soil regions in contrast to the concentration on grazing and dairying in the wood pasture areas.⁷² The sheep flock thus became increasingly significant as a focus of pasture farming; but the switch into sheep farming cannot be shown to be a steady trend and permanent pasture, like arable, was commonly in excess.⁷³ However, for many fifteenth-century landlords sheep flocks were probably their “best defence against declining agrarian

⁶⁹ Bailey, *Sand into Gold*, p 45.

⁷⁰ Thirsk, J., ‘Enclosing and Engrossing’, *AHEW IV*, ed Thirsk J, Cambridge 1967, 209, 210.

⁷¹ Britnell, *Eastern England*, 56; 618

⁷² Thirsk, J., ‘Norfolk and Suffolk’, in *AHEW IV*, ed Thirsk J, Cambridge 1967, 41,47.

⁷³ Britnell, *Eastern England*, 58, 59.

revenues”, and the economics of fifteenth-century sheep rearing favoured larger operators.⁷⁴ For, as the prices for wool and mutton fell, profit came from maximising flock size and minimising costs.⁷⁵ Hence, in the lighter soil regions of East Anglia such as Breckland, there was a gradual increase in seigneurial control of the foldcourse.⁷⁶

The foldcourse was characterised by Allison as a regime that was “mutually beneficial” to both landlord and tenant, the benefit arising from the balance between the two halves of the sheep-corn equation. This shared interest in sheep-corn husbandry of landlord and tenant was also based on the assumption that the two parties were interested in both halves of the equation – sheep and corn. However, by the sixteenth century the interests of landlords and tenants had diverged as the former became increasingly interested only in sheep farming.⁷⁷ In Breckland this growing focus by landlords on the sheep half of the equation saw the replacement of a more flexible system with its diverse ownership of folds,⁷⁸ by the development of a more rigid foldcourse system.⁷⁹

In effect the sixteenth-century foldcourse, as characterised by Allison and others, became a mirror image of its medieval predecessor. Formerly the sheep in the folding flock had been the property of the tenants; now their stock was excluded from the grazing and the system became one in which the lord’s sheep had the right to graze over the lands.⁸⁰ This was a significant change and one that was intensified by some landlords “accelerating” the decline in peasant sheep farming through restricting the tenant’s ability to maintain a fold or contribute sheep to the demesne fold.⁸¹ To what extent the changes in Breckland outlined above can be extended to the other light soil regions of East Anglia as a whole requires further exploration.

⁷⁴ Bailey, *Sand into Gold*, 47.

⁷⁵ Bailey, M., *Medieval Suffolk*, Woodbridge, (2007) 217

⁷⁶ Bailey, *Sand into Gold*, 45.

⁷⁷ Allison, *Sheep-Corn Husbandry*, 22.

⁷⁸ Bailey, *A Marginal Economy*, 67.

⁷⁹ Bailey, *Sand into Gold*, 45.

⁸⁰ Campbell, B. M. S., Overton, M., ‘A New Perspective on Medieval and Early Modern Agriculture: Six Centuries of Norfolk Farming c. 1250-1850’, *Past and Present*, 141, (1993), 77,78

⁸¹ Bailey, *Sand into Gold*, 47.

3.1 'Flockmasters'

By the sixteenth century, in the sheep-corn regions of East Anglia, the diverging interests of landlords and tenants had led to many landlords, with their increasing focus on sheep farming, to lease out their demesne land whilst retaining the foldcourse.⁸² This shift in seigneurial focus reached its greatest extent with the emergence of a "new class of capitalist flockmasters".⁸³ This significant change can also be seen as one of attitude as much as economics: the possession of a foldcourse being a physical "display of power and dominance over the land" through the abuse of foldcourse rights.⁸⁴

Allison's review of the scale and economic impact of Norfolk sheep ranching indicates that it was primarily located on the lighter soils, where there were individual flocks of up to 2000 head.⁸⁵ Flocks were also often spread across a number of vills: for example, the Townshends of Raynham had, at their greatest extent in 1516, flocks in 26 separate locations across north-west Norfolk with a total of 18,000 sheep.⁸⁶ The role of 'flockmaster' in the sense of individuals running large flocks of sheep was not of itself an innovation, for many monastic houses had provided a template for their successors (and inheritors). Sibton Abbey, for example, kept, in the later medieval period, some 2000 sheep on its demesne granges,⁸⁷ and Norwich Cathedral Priory had nearly 3000 sheep in the late fifteenth century with a peak of 8600 in 1517.⁸⁸ Several of the Bury manors, after the dissolution, became the property of the Bacon family - Nicholas the elder purchased Ingham (Suffolk) and then a further foldcourse there, whilst he also ran flocks at Stanford and Eccles in Breckland - so that, by 1556 he had six flocks totalling some 4000 sheep.⁸⁹ A further Bury manor (Culford), where the Abbot possessed over 2000 sheep, became the property of the younger Nicholas Bacon of Redgrave.⁹⁰

⁸² Allison, *Sheep-Corn Husbandry*, 22.

⁸³ Bailey, *Sand into Gold*, 47.

⁸⁴ Whyte, N., *Perceptions of the Norfolk Landscape c. 1500-1750* (2005) Unpublished PhD, UEA, 226

⁸⁵ Allison, K. J., 'Flock Management in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries', *Economic History Review*, 11.1, (1958) 98.

⁸⁶ Moreton, C. E., *The Townshends and their World*, Oxford, (1992), 166.

⁸⁷ Denny, A.H. ed, *The Sibton Abbey Estates – Select Documents 1325-1509*, Suffolk Record Society, 11, (1960), 25

⁸⁸ Bowden, P., *Agricultural Prices, Farm Profits, and Rents*, in *AHEW IV*, ed Thirsk J, Cambridge 1967, 637.

⁸⁹ Simpson, A. *The Wealth of the Gentry 1540-1640*, Cambridge, (1961), 64, 65

⁹⁰ *Ibid*, 184

Although sheep ranching was not a licence to print money, given issues such as disease and fluctuations in the price of wool, Moreton notes that “many in Norfolk found it worthwhile to farm sheep and lease out everything else”.⁹¹ Simpson suggests that at “a rough guess” the owner of a thousand sheep (in ‘long hundreds’, i.e. 1200 sheep) could expect a profit of £40 per annum in the 1540s, perhaps twice what it had been twenty years earlier; a figure that continued to increase markedly into the seventeenth century.⁹² Sheep farming was a major source of the Townshend’s wealth, and Robert Southwell’s profits as a flockmaster were estimated as 25% of his total income although this was reduced to 15% once the costs of the foldcourses that he rented are included.⁹³ This may seem a low figure; but Southwell was, in Simpson’s words, “no mere landlord but heir to a fortune made at court and a courtier himself”.⁹⁴ By definition such people were not themselves running a balanced agricultural regime – they collected rents rather than being husbandmen on a grand scale.⁹⁵ The Townshends for example, leased out their manors: as single units, divided into several farms, or piecemeal; whilst maintaining, in the late fifteenth century at least a small demesne arable at Raynham of some 2-300 acres.⁹⁶

The Lestranges of Hunstanton provide a rather different slant on the role and attitudes of the flockmaster. They certainly fulfilled the role in terms of foldcourses, having eight at seven different locations in north-west Norfolk in 1534 and between two and three thousand sheep in the 1540s.⁹⁷ The significant difference perhaps is that in the sixteenth century, as long established lords at Hunstanton and having by the end of the fifteenth century acquired three of the town’s four manors, they acted with what Oestmann characterises as a “paternalistic notion of lordship” that might have been seen as anachronistic by the middle of the sixteenth century.⁹⁸ This manifested itself in providing demesne arable land for small and medium sized farmers from which the Lestranges benefited, according to Oestmann, through a reduction in local farming competition and minimising the numbers of poor and landless.⁹⁹ This paternalism with regard to the tenants of the labour intensive arable lands in Hunstanton was perhaps in sharp contrast to the behaviour of some other flockmasters discussed below; but the general direction towards a ‘close parish’ was one that others probably followed.

⁹¹ Moreton, 169,175

⁹² Simpson, *Wealth of Gentry*, 194

⁹³ Moreton, 162, Allison, *Flock Management*, 112

⁹⁴ Simpson, *Wealth of Gentry*, 183

⁹⁵ Moreton, 138

⁹⁶ *Ibid*, 139, 148

⁹⁷ Oestmann, C. *Lordship and Community*, Woodbridge, (1994), 145, 143

⁹⁸ *Ibid*, 12, 29

⁹⁹ *Ibid*, 85

3.2 Capitalists and Entrepreneurs

Following a review of a number of later fifteenth-century gentry families across England, Dyer asked whether the likes of the Townshends, with their specialisation, larger scales of operation and investment, were entrepreneurs and capitalists?¹⁰⁰ For a number of the more enterprising gentry were at this time beginning to produce for the market, taking on the demesnes of other lords, and commonly focussing on pasture – for example the Spencer and Catesby families in Warwickshire and Northamptonshire.¹⁰¹ The first Townshend to become known as a gentleman – Sir Roger Townshend I, who died in 1493 - was a self-made man whose father, John, had been a wealthy yeoman. The latter, when he died in 1466 owned two manors and other lands in Raynham and its surroundings and was worth £40 *per annum*, enough to support, in theory, a knighthood.¹⁰² Such entrepreneurs were an exception for many of the gentry depended mainly on demesne rents and rents in kind from their tenants, and in this they were following the owners of larger landed estates who largely abandoned direct management of their demesnes in favour of leasing in the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.¹⁰³

Britnell prepared a summary of the contrasts between “feudalism” and capitalism which may help in trying to answer Dyer’s question, especially as it pertains, in a late medieval and early modern context, to the foldcourse and the growth of sheep ranching in East Anglia.¹⁰⁴ One is that “capitalist agrarian production is carried out in larger units on land that has been gathered into fewer hands”; which is a succinct description of the behaviour of a number of the larger landlords in Norfolk and Suffolk, and the issue of engrossment, which led to arguments over the foldcourse in a number of places, will be discussed further. Secondly, that “agricultural production was largely dependent on wage labour following the elimination of peasant producers and labour rents from the equation”, and “that economic dependence is a contractual relationship”. These conditions can be contrasted with the arguments about customs and rights that the foldcourse generated, the disagreements with the gentry in particular that some authors have associated with Kett’s rebellion (see below), and the leasing out of demesnes by owners that was part of the development of the foldcourse.

¹⁰⁰ Dyer, C., *Making a Living in the Middle Ages*, London, (2002), 345

¹⁰¹ Ibid, 343

¹⁰² Moreton, 7; Maddern, P. C., ‘Social Mobility’, in *A Social History of England 1200-1500*, ed Horrox R & Ormrod W. M, Cambridge, (2006), 114

¹⁰³ Dyer, *Making a Living*, 343; Britnell, R., *The Commercialisation of English Society 1000-1500*, (Manchester), 1996, 188

¹⁰⁴ Britnell, *Commercialisation of English Society*, 235

It is perhaps the third of Britnell's contrasts - the propensity of "capitalists" to "innovate and accumulate" - which in terms of the foldcourse and East Anglia is the critical shift. Dyer himself thought that the Townshends *et al.* were "entrepreneurial capitalists" but that they were exceptions to the gentry as a whole; and Maddern, similarly, suggests that, in the fifteenth century, few rose to wealth through agricultural success alone, again picking out the Spencers in Warwickshire and the Townshends as exceptions to this 'rule', and noting also how John Townshend's agricultural profits started his son on the way to wealth.¹⁰⁵ If they were capitalists (I think entrepreneur is probably a more appropriate term: capitalism being an organised system rather than individualistic activity) then an appropriate input of capital itself was needed and as Dyer points out it was the law which "gave a useful income to many and allowed some stars to amass large landed estates".¹⁰⁶ Roger Townshend was a prominent lawyer and the law was a common link between a number of the gentry families in Norfolk – including the Heydons, Hobarts, Pastons Wyndhams and Bacons.¹⁰⁷ The law was not a popular trade in late Medieval England and East Anglia in particular was a region with a litigious reputation with, according to an Elizabethan Parliamentary petition, "an allegedly excessive number of attorneys...who were said to encourage vexatious suits for their own profits".¹⁰⁸

Along with capital, successful lawyers also, I would suggest, brought a willingness to challenge custom – especially where their training and background gave them the basis to try and undo what were seen as time honoured custom and practice but could also be seen as restraints on accumulation. As Thirsk puts it, proto-capitalist farmers (her description) "disliked accommodating themselves to communal rules of husbandry".¹⁰⁹ More generally, the demands drawn up during Kett's rebellion of 1549, have been described as giving "a strong impression of the desire to recapture a past world where everyone knew his place and function"; and by another author as being "moderate in tone" whilst at the same time suggesting that the rebels "hated the gentry" and wanted a different, more hierarchal society from the one that they knew.¹¹⁰ More generally, the later sixteenth century saw an immense increase in litigation, the major cause of which seems to lie with increasing commercial activity, but the lawyers of East

¹⁰⁵ Dyer, *Making a Living*, 345; Maddern, 127

¹⁰⁶ Dyer, *Making a Living*, 341

¹⁰⁷ Moreton, 5, 10; Simpson, *Wealth of Gentry*, 33

¹⁰⁸ Walker, S., 'Order and Law', in *A Social History of England 1200-1500*, ed Horrox R & Ormrod W. M, Cambridge, (2006), 100; Moreton, 10

¹⁰⁹ Thirsk, *Norfolk and Suffolk*, 34

¹¹⁰ Fletcher, A. MacCulloch, D., *Tudor Rebellions*, Harlow (1997), 73; Williams, P., *The Later Tudors, England 1547-1603*, Oxford (1995), 53

Anglia were providing many examples of disputes over the foldcourse; and archival searches indicate that these disputes were as much, if not more, between lord and lord rather than lords and tenants.¹¹¹

3.3 Sheep or Corn?

The foregoing has outlined how the balance in sheep-corn husbandry was increasingly divided between two separate interests: sheep farming landowners and arable tenants. Thus, at one end of the spectrum is what one might label the ‘flockmaster’ model with large flocks managed in hand and all the arable leased. It is unclear the extent to which the model was followed - if on a reduced scale - by the majority of landlords; or was conversely restricted to a particular group of large landholders but Bailey sees the decline in the scale of peasant sheep farming as inevitable.¹¹² Some manors and lords may, however, have maintained the balance between arable and pasture farming within the estate. In Allison’s view sheep-corn husbandry was maintained “even by de-populating landlords” and in places where all the lands in the foldcourse and all the sheep were in single hands.¹¹³

The changes in the nature of the foldcourse represent a growth in control - an evolution that was driven by agrarian specialisation, and the entrepreneurial opportunities outlined above. These developments also had a significant social impact (discussed below) with their increased pressure on custom as opposed to ‘demonstrable’ rights. The changes in the foldcourse were therefore both a result of, and a response to, these pressures and trends and the foldcourse of 1600 was, I would suggest, a very different animal from that of 1350.

¹¹¹ Williams, 151

¹¹² Bailey, *Sand into Gold*, 48

¹¹³ Allison, *Sheep-Corn Husbandry*, 25.

4. WHAT WAS A FOLDCOURSE?

The foregoing has offered a number of definitions, as suggested by previous writers, of the foldcourse and also outlined the components thereof. My own definition would be that a foldcourse had two elements: firstly, the vast majority of tenants had to put their sheep in the Lord's fold which, in its earlier manifestation, may or may not have included demesne animals; secondly, the lord possessed an exclusive right to employ that fold to manure his demesne lands. Over time the ownership of the sheep in the flock shifted from tenant to lord, and with it the lord's focus. The agrarian role of the foldcourse – to deliver the tathe – remained important. It was for the lord a source of income, and without it the arable would have deteriorated in quality, with a consequent loss of rental income and probably the replacement of good tenants with poor ones. The foldcourse remained an important factor in the farming of the light soil regions, though its role became, over time, more sophisticated.

The following descriptions (all from the seventeenth century) come firstly from a historian and antiquary, and secondly from a lawyer. Taken together they flesh out what was understood to be a foldcourse and its important components. Sir Henry Spelman (1563/4–1641) was well placed to do so having been born in Congham near Kings Lynn, married into the Lestrange family and inevitably writing from the perspective of the foldcourse owner.¹¹⁴ A foldcourse, according to Spelman “is a liberty to erect a fold within a certain precinct of ground for ordering ye shepe of ye fould and tathing ye land therein, and also to feede ye shepe...at all seasons of the year...some shep's courses there be wch properly may not be fouldcourses, namely such as lye upon waste, heath or commons, where never any plough or fould for tashing doth com”.¹¹⁵ Spelman further explored both the operation and origins of the foldcourse in his *Glossarium Archaiologicum*, first published in 1626, though the following is from an edition of 1664.¹¹⁶ He separated the foldcourse into its two elements: *faldagium* – a right of erecting and surrounding folds [i.e. flocks]... for the sake of their dung and the protection of the flock – the setting up of a fold [being] the prerogative of the lord; and *sectam falda* (foldsuit) – the obligation of the tenant's sheep to manure the demesne. The term foldcourse he characterised as the vernacular *cursus falde & cursus faldagii* (course of fold and course of foldage). Now (i.e. the early seventeenth century) the sheep of the lord and the tenants form one grazing flock

¹¹⁴ <http://www.oxforddnb.com>

¹¹⁵ Quoted in: Postgate, M. R., 'Field Systems of East Anglia' 317

¹¹⁶ <http://eebo.chadwyck.com>, 210,211

under the lord's shepherd, to whose wages the tenants contribute, and that all the sheep are in the lord's fold.

Spelman also wrote a more general description of the foldcourse in which he placed it in its geographical and agrarian context. He characterised west Norfolk as the "champion [which] aboundeth with Corne, Sheepe and Conies and...barren Heaths...are very profitable. For on them...lie our Fold-courses"; the combination of sheep, heath and the tathe being "the chiefest wealth of our country".¹¹⁷

The second 'witness' is William Bassett a Kings Lynn lawyer, and is from a letter of 1674 to Sir Christopher Calthorp a foldcourse owner in Holme.¹¹⁸ The letter was with regard to a dispute over Calthorp's foldcourse, and the crux of the arguments between Calthorpe and his tenants appears to have been over the view of the latter that Calthorp wanted to stop them sowing winter crops. In the letter Bassett set out what might be called the points for the defence (or is it the prosecution?):

Firstly, to maintain "his right of ffoldcourse and ffaldage belonging to this manor of Holme".

Secondly "to have the usage of the said ffoldcourse confirmed as namely that the lord hath liberty to feed 300 sheepe and the townsmen owners of communable messuages liberty to feede 300 sheepe and the shepherds 60 sheepe in the said ffoldcourse".

"Thirdly to have y[ou]r privileges of the flock belonging to the said foldcourse in its walkes and feedings confirmed, namely that it hath liberty of feed at all times in the yeare in y[ou]r common marshes and commons and commonable places in Holme...and in [th]e ffields of Holme unsowne w[ith] corne in and uppon Michaelmas Day and from then to Our Lady day [25th March] in every yeare".

"Fourthly to have the privileges of the lord or owners of the said foldcourse confirmed namely to have the nominacon and appointment of the shepherds the benefit of the tathe according to the custom of all foldcourses".

"Fifthly to have the owners of the commononable messuages stinted...so surcharging may be p[re]vented".

¹¹⁷ Spelman, H., 'Norfolke' in John Speed, *England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland Described*, (1627)

<http://historicaltexts.jisc.ac.uk>

¹¹⁸ NRO LEST P/20, 98

“Sixthly to have the customs of paying 4d a sheep yearly by the comons laying sheep towards the shepherds wages still to be injoyed as formerly”.

“Seventh to have all p[er]sons having lands within the p[re]cincts of the foldcourse to be injoyed to sow the lands in corse and not to sow lesse than 3 acres in a piece”.

“Eighth to have all p[er]sons who have inclosed lands wi[th]in the p[re]cinct of the foldcourse contrary to ancient usages to be injoyed to lay open the same again for... fede of the flocke”.

The points enumerated above are an indication both of the degree of complexity of the foldcourse and of the potential for conflict inherent in it; and I will return to these aspects in the following chapters.

5. SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Whilst the social disturbances of mid-sixteenth-century East Anglia are outside the immediate scope of this thesis, one cannot ignore them. They are important both as an illustration of the changes to the agrarian regimes of the time and the disputes that those changes generated. Interestingly, Allison, who as Bailey has pointed out, was more interested in the social aspects of the foldcourse, largely excused the flockmasters from the abuses of the foldcourse that led to social unrest.¹¹⁹ Allison provided a catalogue of what he saw as landlord abuses of the foldcourse, most of which arose from the complexities that have been previously outlined. These included: making no allowances to tenants for unsown land; lengthening the shack period; feeding the manorial flocks over the tenants' winter sown corn; overstocking the open field stubble and the commons and heaths; denying tenants their cullet rights and setting up new foldcourses.¹²⁰

¹¹⁹ Bailey, *Marginal Economy*, 66; Allison, *Flock Management*, 99

¹²⁰ Allison, *Sheep-Corn Husbandry*, 22, 23

Simpson, riding to the defence of the landlords, queried the scale of the abuses and wondered to what extent the complaints were “the perennial bickering of the countryside” or “the petty tyrannies of a few bad landlords”? He also suggested that a number of ‘abuses’ were established customs in Norfolk and makes the valid point that Allison’s examples are based on a “handful of cases”.¹²¹ Certainly, abuses such as overstocking the commons and exceeding the stint could probably be categorised as ‘bickering’ and were frequent causes of presentation at the manorial court but the relative scale of such ‘abuses’ is important and the implication of the complaints is that such ‘rights’ or customs that were being abused or removed were of some longevity. The tenants were not passive in their response to the changes brought about by landlords: moving foldcourse boundary markers at Elveden; sowing seed contrary to the shift, thus disrupting the area available for grazing and shack, and enclosing their open-field strips.¹²² It is, however, difficult to envisage the former without the latter – to sow out of shift without in some way protecting the growing crop, would be self-defeating as the crop would become fodder for the flock. Overall, many of the actions of the tenants can be viewed as “frustrated outbursts” caused by the erosion of communal rights.¹²³

One of the consequences of the increase in lordly sheep farming and the abuses outlined above was depopulation, leading in some cases to settlement shrinkage and desertion.¹²⁴ Settlements were, however, never static and such events were rarely mono-causal - Davison for example outlines a range of natural and man-made factors that influenced settlement decline and desertion.¹²⁵ Dyer, writing about the West Midlands suggests that desertion was a long-term process that was underway in the first half of the fourteenth century.¹²⁶ The activity of flockmasters may have led to desertion, for example at Choseley and Holt (a hamlet near Bawsey); in addition a group of villis around Fakenham (Thorpland, Alethorpe, Pudding Norton and Sturston) were similarly afflicted.¹²⁷ The place-name or element ‘thorp’ occurs twice in that short list, and Thorp commonly meant a secondary or outlying farm attached to another settlement.¹²⁸ Fox suggests that ‘thorp’ is a term of Scandinavian origin; and, in the wolds of Lincolnshire and Yorkshire, indicated a new settlement established in the tenth and eleventh

¹²¹ Simpson, *The EastAnglian Foldcourse*, 92

¹²² Bailey, *Sand into Gold*, 51; Allison, *Sheep-Corn Husbandry*, 25

¹²³ Bailey, *Sand into Gold*, 51

¹²⁴ Allison, *Sheep-Corn Husbandry*, 24

¹²⁵ Davison, A., *Deserted Villages in Norfolk*, North Walsham (1996) 22-33.

¹²⁶ Dyer, C., ‘Deserted Medieval Villages in the West Midlands’, *Economic History Review* 35.1 (1982), 22

¹²⁷ Davison, *Deserted Villages*, 28, 46

¹²⁸ Rye, J., *A Popular Guide to Norfolk Place-names*, Dereham, (1991), 3.

centuries, often occupying “inferior sites”.¹²⁹ In Norfolk thorps predominantly represent “places of minor importance” and greater risk of desertion.¹³⁰ More recently, a study of ‘thorps’ in the east midlands showed that the great majority remained hamlets as opposed to villages and that nearly half were subsequently abandoned.¹³¹

Both Dyer and Fox see a link between small or marginal settlements and later desertion and that desertion was bound to be swifter and more easily accomplished in the smaller settlements.¹³² Overall, settlements were in a continual flux of development and desertion; subject to “a process of natural selection” in which the weak declined but, Dyer suggests, that allowance has to be made for “chance elements” such as an acquisitive landlord.¹³³ I am not sure that it is chance - would not such a landlord ‘prey’ upon the weak first in this Darwinian environment?

Alethorpe was a settlement that appears to ‘tick all the boxes’ with regard to landlord oppression. The landlord in question was William Dye and witnesses, for both him and the plaintiff Thomas Langdon, gave evidence concerning enclosures within the foldcourse in Alethorpe before Nathaniel Bacon and three other commissioners on two occasions in 1580.¹³⁴ Langdon was in dispute with Dye over a thirty-acre croft from which Langdon had excluded Dye’s flock and subsequently impounded the sheep. It was however (inevitably?) a more nuanced argument with witnesses testifying that the custom of the manor had long allowed the enclosure of lands ‘at will and pleasure’ and for them to be kept several. The outcome of the commissioners’ investigations is unclear but Davison suggests that it is probable that Dye successfully defended himself.¹³⁵ This was not, however, the end of the arguments at Alethorpe for in 1604 four “poore inhabitants of Althrophe” again petitioned the Justices of the Peace about Dye’s “divers injuries and wronges”. The petition listed a catalogue of complaints including: “surcharging our small common with his sheepe”, thus starving their great cattle; enclosing his lands that were formerly open for the maintenance of his foldcourse, and keeping

¹²⁹ Fox, H. S. A., ‘The People of the Wolds in English Settlement History’, in *The Rural Settlement of Medieval England*, eds Aston, M., Austin, D., Dyer, C., Oxford, (1989), 91, 93

¹³⁰ Williamson, T., *The Origins of Norfolk*, Manchester (1993), 109

¹³¹ Jones, R., ‘Contrasting patterns of village and hamlet desertion in England’ in *Deserted Villages Revisited*, eds Dyer, C., Jones, R., Hatfield, (2010), 19

¹³² Dyer *Deserted Medieval Villages*, 31, 33; Fox, *People of the Wolds*, 97

¹³³ Jones, *Contrasting Patterns*, 27, Dyer *Deserted Medieval Villages*, 33

¹³⁴ Hassell Smith, A., Baker, G. M., *The Papers of Nathaniel Bacon of Stiffkey*, II, *Norfolk Record Society*, XLIX, 1982, 131, 152.

¹³⁵ Davison, *Deserted Villages*, 50

them several to himself all year whilst maintaining his full allowance of sheep. It was also claimed that he “breaketh up other mens severall grounde” for the free passage of his sheep, that he put his sheep on new sown winter corn and into the home yards and orchards of others.¹³⁶ The ‘four poor inhabitants’ did not include Thomas Langdon, but they were certainly poorer than Dye in terms of landholding; for (by coincidence?) Bacon was the recipient of a valuation for Alethorpe earlier in 1604. This shows that a William Day [Dye?] held 100 acres at £24, whilst three of the four petitioners held tenements each with less than ten acres and valued at 10 to 50s. The fourth petitioner was Henry Greene and a Henry Greve had 25 acres at £4 in the valuation.¹³⁷

In the case of Alethorpe it is of note that both parties refer to enclosure and severalty as distinct and separate elements, and that both held such lands. The letter to Bacon would suggest that the real complaints were not about enclosure *per se*, but that Dye maintained the same number of sheep in his flock after enclosure, and enforced, as the owner of a foldcourse, either what he felt was his right, or wanted to establish as a right, that is for his sheep to have free rein to feed in the tenants’ enclosures. Alethorpe and Thorpland also illustrate the local differences with regard to customs in neighbouring settlements. At the former it was apparently the custom to permit enclosure, whilst at the latter the complainants objected to Henry Fermor enclosing his foldcourse;¹³⁸ and it is perhaps the scale, rather than the principle of enclosure which is being objected to.

Allison also saw the abuses of the foldcourse as one of the causes underlying Kett’s rebellion.¹³⁹ The foldcourse is not, however, as Simpson points out, specifically mentioned in the list of complaints drawn up by the rebels, but at least three of those complaints (3, 11, 13) were concerned with various abuses of the commons.¹⁴⁰ In contrast to Simpson, MacCulloch, who made a more detailed examination of the connection between the rebellion and the differing agrarian regimes of East Anglia, does detect the foldcourse and its abuses behind the final complaint, describing it as “a clear call for a radical curb on the foldcourse system”.¹⁴¹ The complaint in question was: “we pray that no lorde knight esquyer nor gentleman do g[raze]

¹³⁶ Morgan, V., Rutledge, E., Taylor, B., *The Papers of Nathaniel Bacon of Stiffkey*, V, Norfolk Record Society, LXXIV, (2010), 112.

¹³⁷ *Ibid*, 69

¹³⁸ Davison, *Deserted Villages*, 48

¹³⁹ Allison, *Sheep-Corn Husbandry*, 22

¹⁴⁰ Simpson, 91; Fletcher, MacCulloch,, 144.

¹⁴¹ MacCulloch, D., ‘Kett’s Rebellion in Context’, *Past & Present*, 84 (1979), 50.

nor fede eny bullockes or shepe if he may spende forty pou[nds] a yere by his lands but only for the provicion of his howse".¹⁴² How closely this complaint can be tied to the specific abuses of the foldcourse is open to question. It clearly encompasses the more general concerns such as abuses of the commons, and it may be aimed at the lord's right to feed his flock over the tenants' lands, but if so why is it not more directly expressed? Whilst the list of complaints drawn up by the rebels is 'moderate in tone', the complainants are in general clear about their concerns.

5.1 Enclosure and Engrossment

One of the factors that could lead to desertion was engrossment - that is, the expansion of the demesne and the replacement of small tenancies with larger and more profitable ones.¹⁴³ Enclosure and engrossing were "controversial topics" in sixteenth-century England, inciting riots, commissions of enquiry and parliamentary statutes, and whilst neither activity was new the most contentious enclosures were those involving the conversion of arable to pasture, particularly in the Midland shires.¹⁴⁴ In East Anglia as a whole, the enclosure of the common pastures in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, probably created "more friction" than piecemeal enclosure of arable land.¹⁴⁵ Whilst Allison also saw enclosure as connected to the agrarian move from arable to pasture, he suggests that landlords in the sheep-corn region of Norfolk, rather than using large-scale enclosures and conversion to pasture as a means to achieve the change, were able to use the foldcourse as a mechanism to increase the size of their flocks through the abuses documented above.¹⁴⁶

The first enquiry into enclosure was held in 1517, though Thirsk suggests that it probably failed to recognize both the regional differences in enclosure, and the difference between enclosing and engrossing.¹⁴⁷ Allison's analysis of the Norfolk element of the 1517 returns indicates that enclosures were, individually, small in area and that the conversion of arable to pasture did not occur to any extent; such inclosures representing a loss of shack rights and common rights over newly enclosed pasture.¹⁴⁸ Thirsk has commented that the returns that have survived are so

¹⁴² Ibid, 52.

¹⁴³ Davison, *Deserted Villages*, 30

¹⁴⁴ Thirsk, *Enclosure and Engrossing*, 200, 201, 209, 240.

¹⁴⁵ Bailey, *Sand into Gold*, 51

¹⁴⁶ Allison, *Sheep-Corn Husbandry*, 24

¹⁴⁷ Thirsk, J., *Tudor Enclosures*, London, (1959), 10.

¹⁴⁸ Allison, *Sheep-Corn Husbandry*, 24

fragmentary as to make it difficult to draw any conclusions about the extent of enclosing and engrossing. The Norfolk data does, however, cover the largest number of vills (122) of any county and among the largest acreage.¹⁴⁹ In geographical terms the 1517 returns for Norfolk are of interest, showing that the greatest number of inclosures was in the foldcourse country: in the hundreds of Freebridge Lynn (2400 acres, virtually all pasture); Launditch (1447 acres of mostly small inclosures); and Smithdon (1036 acres, 91% of which was pasture).¹⁵⁰ There are also a number of references to settlement desertion: at Choseley, 600 acres of pasture were inclosed and five or possibly ten “houses decayed”; and at Castle Acre “*unum integrum hamelett cum omnibus tenementis*” was also ‘decayed’.¹⁵¹ Overall however, one should remember that the 10,454 acres inclosed or converted to pasture represent less than 1% of the area covered by the inquisition in Norfolk.¹⁵²

The foldcourse also attracted the attention of Parliament which in 1533 passed an ‘Acte Conc[er]nyng Fermes & Shepe’ which was described by Thirsk as “punitive legislation” and “an attack on sheepmasters”.¹⁵³ This Act was designed to address the “evil of the excess of land employed in pasture instead of tillage”; and stated that “no man shall keep above 2000 sheep except lambs under one year old”, including those who held the liberty of a foldcourse.¹⁵⁴ The Act went on to specifically address issues to do with the foldcourse “in any town tithing village or hamlet in Norfolk and Suffolk”. It stated that “no person...being lord or lords owner or farmer of any liberty of foldcourses” was to “take in farm...any quilleys of lands or pastures... appertaining to any other person... and lying within the said liberty of foldcourse” but that the foldcourse owner should permit the owner of the said quilleys to manure and pasture his lands, and for that owner’s sheep to go with the flock of the foldcourse owner, “paying the customary charges for the keeping and feeding of the same”. These parts of the act applied only where “tenants owners and occupiers of any such quilleys have had or might have had heretofore of right and duty used to have pasture and feeding in the said foldcourses by reason of their tenures and occupations of the said quilleys and none otherwise”. The act was thus in effect defending those tenants with fold rights or a tenurial right to partake in the fold, trying (unconsciously?) to preserve the former more diverse folding arrangements that were under significant lordly

¹⁴⁹ Thirsk, *Enclosure and Engrossing*, 241

¹⁵⁰ Leadam, I. S., ‘The Inquisition of 1517. Inclosures and Evictions, Part II’ *Trans Royal Hist Soc*, (1893), 139, 141

¹⁵¹ *ibid*, 138, 143, 155

¹⁵² *ibid*, 137

¹⁵³ Thirsk *Enclosure and Engrossing*, 227

¹⁵⁴ 1533-34, Henry VIII, Anno 25, c 13, in *Statutes of the Realm*, vol. 3, *Henry VIII*, (1818), 451, 452, 453

pressure. For those who did not have such a right, the foldcourse owner could take such quilleys that were within the foldcourse in farm – “*agreeing* [my italics] with the owner or occupiers of the said quilleys for the same”.¹⁵⁵ In drawing this distinction between those tenants who had rights to feed their sheep and those who claimed a customary ‘right’ the act is making a clear statement in favour of rights over custom. Thus when Bailey writes of the foldcourse being used “to invade peasant rights”, this has to be qualified with regard to the tenure of the lands within the foldcourse – those who could prove a right were, in theory at least, protected from the depredations of the buyer or lord; those tenants who partook by custom were done for.¹⁵⁶ That the Act should, in part, be specifically addressed to the issues concerning the foldcourse is a further indication of the arguments and disputes concerning custom and rights that the institution was generating. Contemporaneous with the Parliamentary Acts, the central law courts were increasingly involved as “mediators in local disputes...encouraged a degree of standardisation of medieval agrarian customs and practices”; with landowners using the courts to protect and expand their foldcourse rights.¹⁵⁷ One wonders to what extent the ‘noise’ from the law courts led to the singling out of the foldcourse in Norfolk and Suffolk (but not Cambridgeshire) in the 1533 Act, as a separate and distinct issue from the general concern over the decline of arable farming at the time.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid, 453

¹⁵⁶ Bailey, *Sand into Gold*, 47

¹⁵⁷ Whyte, *Perceptions of Norfolk Landscape*, 225

6. FOCUS AND STRUCTURE

The focus of this thesis will be on the agrarian environment and the integral part that the foldcourse played within it. The questions that I intend to address can be grouped as follows. Firstly, the manor and manorial rights clearly played a pivotal role in the foldcourse. However, in the multi-manorial situation common in East Anglia how did the foldcourse function in practice? How widespread was the intermingling of the arable holdings of each manor? Did all the manors in a township have a foldcourse and, if not, what might be the criteria for possession? How did manorial rights and custom operate in areas such as the interaction of foldcourse and post-harvest shack? To what extent were the commons and heathland pastures several or common?

Secondly, there is the context within which the foldcourse operated. What was the relationship of the foldcourse with soil typology, patterns of settlement and field systems? Where in the spectrum from East Anglian individualism, to the highly communal Midland system of farming, does the sheep-corn husbandry of western East Anglia stand? More specifically, the foldcourse formed part of a wider collection of agrarian practices, and its relationship with these has not always been fully understood. I will explore the variable cropping regimes, the general absence of a three-course rotation, the significance of these and of extended periods of fallowing to the improvement of soil quality. To what degree, if any, were individual holdings of the tenants in the open field clustered? A further important component of farming and the foldcourse was the role of infield-outfield agriculture - in particular, the topography of the foldcourse itself and the integration of brecks or outfields into the farming cycle. Finally, how did the fold itself operate and what were the constraints on its working?

Thirdly, I will undertake a detailed examination of the rationale behind a number of the features particularly associated with the foldcourse: how may the shift have developed; what part did cullet rights play; who 'owned' the tathe; and how did exchanges and compensation for the tenant's lands within the foldcourse operate? Lastly, I will examine the overall role of the East Anglian version of sheep-corn husbandry: its origins and evolution; why it was so long-lived and how successful was it, in comparison to such husbandry elsewhere in lowland England.

The structure of this thesis is, broadly, as follows. Chapter 2 will examine the distribution of the foldcourse in East Anglia, in relation to the soil landscapes and time. I will also explore the nature of the 'foldcourse' in east Norfolk. In Chapter 3 I will examine the evolution of the

foldcourse, beginning with Domesday and the use of the term ‘fold’; exploring its use in terms of distribution, jurisdiction, and the relationship of lords and the status of the peasant population. This will be followed by an exploration of the various terms - such as foldsoke, foldage and liberty of fold – that were employed in the medieval period, to demonstrate that the ownership of sheep and folds was widespread. Chapter 4 will explore the overall context of the foldcourse in East Anglia in terms of tenurial relationships, patterns of settlement, field systems and how the farming environment may have been managed.

Chapters 5 and 6 are devoted to the foldcourse and farming. The first will discuss the agrarian environment in which the foldcourse operated with regard to husbandry regimes – particularly infield-outfield agriculture - cropping regimes and the benefits of extended fallowing. Chapter 6 will firstly examine the various components of the foldcourse, and its topography and diversity. The second section will attempt to integrate the role of the foldcourse and the farming environment, primarily using material relating to the Lestrange estate. Appendix 1 contains a wider discussion concerning sheep-corn husbandry: its agrarian role; geographical distribution; and a more detailed examination of such husbandry in Wiltshire.

2 THE DISTRIBUTION OF THE FOLDCOURSE

1. INTRODUCTION

Allison suggested that, if one excluded the Fens and Broads, sheep-corn husbandry extended across two thirds of Norfolk in the later middle ages and the early modern period, covering an arc through the south west, west and north east of the county and further that the foldcourse was unique to Norfolk and north-west Suffolk.¹ Nathaniel Bacon in his description of Norfolk in 1595 provides a similar picture (Fig 2.1), dividing the hundreds of the county into those “of soyles apt for grayne and sheep” (further divided into those “most apt and so ymplied to wheate” and those for barley and rye) and those best suited “for woode and pasture”.² Whilst the sheep-corn country as so far described broadly equates to Bacon’s “barley and rye” hundreds he saw sheep as also being important in both the “barley and rye” and “wheat” zones of the county. Henry Spelman, a contemporary of Bacon’s, described the foldcourse as restricted to the heaths of Norfolk, Suffolk and Cambridgeshire.³ The geographic extent of the foldcourse has been further broadened: Postgate has pointed out that it was common in upland Cambridgeshire; and it was also employed in in north-west Essex around Saffron Walden.⁴

1.1 Data Sources

The following analysis of the temporal and spatial distribution of foldcourse references was conducted in order to examine the distribution in relation to the soil landscape and to ascertain the extent to which the term ‘foldcourse’ was employed beyond those areas with which it is usually associated. The principal source for the data used to construct the distribution map was an on-line search of archival records; the mapping is thus of documentary references to foldcourses and liberty of fold, and not the practices themselves. The search was primarily conducted through National Archives and Access to Archives (A2A)⁵ but the record office websites for Norfolk, Cambridgeshire, Hertfordshire and Essex were also separately searched and the results for all the searches are summarised in Appendix 2. The searches were conducted in the last quarter of 2008, using a number of the terms that are associated with the foldcourse and the management of flocks, including plurals and possible variant spellings of those terms.

¹ Allison, *Sheep-corn Husbandry*, 12, 14

² Hassell Smith, A., Baker, G. M. ed, *The Papers of Nathaniel Bacon III*, Norfolk Record Society, LIII, (1988), 319

³ Spelman, H., *Glossarium*, <http://eebo.chadwyck.com>

⁴ Postgate, *Field Systems*, 318; Cromarty, D., *The Fields of Saffron Walden in 1400*, 18, Chelmsford, 1966

⁵ <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/a2a>

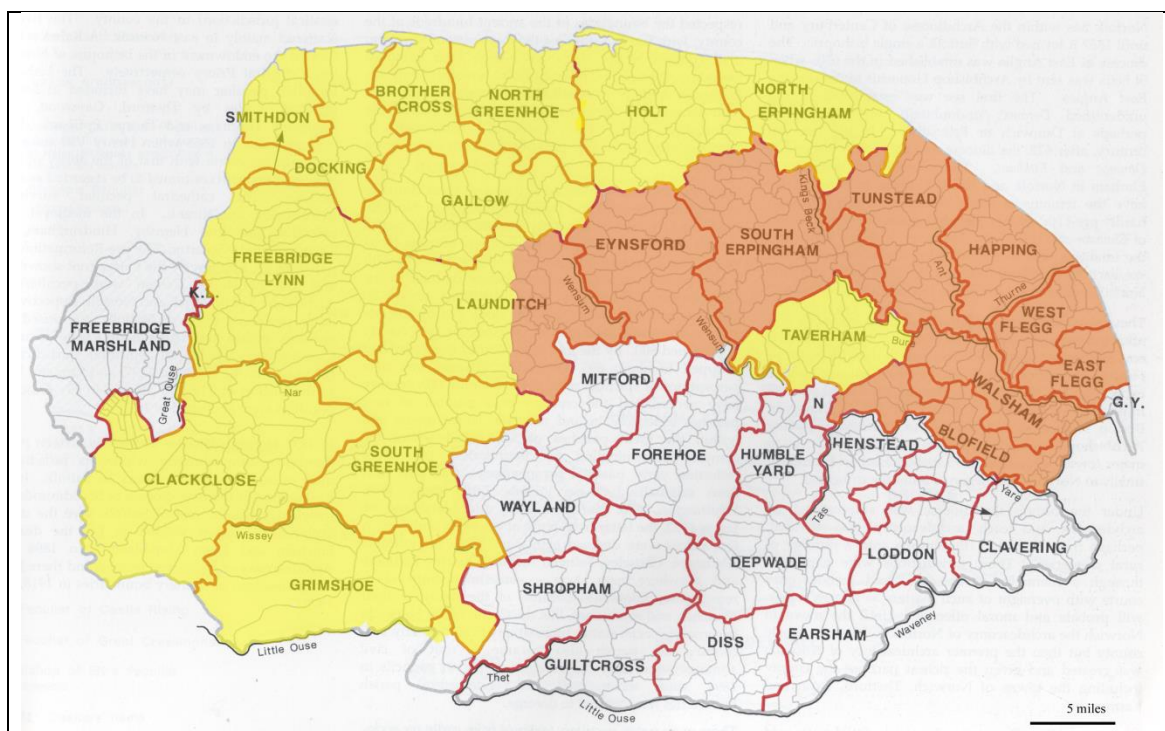


Fig 2.1: Bacon's Classification of Norfolk Hundreds.

Soils most apt for barley and rye (yellow); soils most apt for wheat (orange).

One of the problems in mapping the archival sources is the simple manner of the summaries that accompany the records produced by the on-line search. These will often list a number of locations and those that actually contain the search term being used will not always be clear, for example: "farm...and foldage and foldcourse in Haverhill, Withersfield and Little Wrating". An examination of the document itself makes clear that the foldcourse elements are in Haverhill only.⁶ A further example is a description of the manor of Lavenham and Brent Eleigh, including a comprehensive list of the manor's holdings and its liberties and rights including liberty of foldage in five other townships.⁷ The document itself does not clarify where the liberty of foldage lay and I have assumed, for the purpose of distribution mapping that it was in Lavenham. Some locations can be eliminated by the fact that they already appear in the group of single locations; others appear in several references and as a first cut one can assume a likelihood of a foldcourse being present.

⁶ ERO, D/DGd E13

⁷ SROB, 1754/1/482

The number and distribution by county of references to the foldcourse and associated terms (table 2.1) demonstrates that virtually all the references (95%) are from East Anglia as broadly defined (Norfolk, Suffolk, Cambridgeshire and Essex) and that those for Norfolk (79%) are dominant. These results thus confirm that the foldcourse and liberty of fold were institutions that were focussed on East Anglia. A number of the remaining references occur in counties such as Sussex and Lincolnshire that are associated, in part at least, with sheep-corn husbandry but their numbers are small; the remainder are an isolated scattering across southern England. The ‘outlier’ in Monmouthshire occurs in an indenture of 1836 related to the marriage of Lady Mary Ann Vaughan, widow of Sir Thomas Gage of Henham Hall, Suffolk and William Vaughan of Monmouthshire, where fold, foldcourse and liberty of foldage occur in an extended list of manorial rights, including warrens. The occurrence is perhaps to be seen as an East Anglian lawyer ‘sweeping up’ various regional rights in a cover-all fashion.⁸ The archival search also included a range of the more general terms that could be associated with sheep-corn husbandry, and, perhaps surprisingly, produced relatively few hits given the ubiquity of such husbandry in parts of England: fold and folding produced 26 and foldage and faldage 32. As before, the great majority of these were in Norfolk (35) and Suffolk (7).

This lack of references to folds or folding from areas outside of East Anglia requires an explanation - whilst the foldcourse as a term if not a *system* is clearly East Anglian, sheep folding was certainly not. One answer may be that the very ubiquity of sheep and their management in medieval and early modern agriculture was such that the need to refer to them, unless there were disputes, was superfluous. Many of the East Anglian references are initiated by such disputes and recourse to law which, in its turn, generated records - Bailey has written of the sixteenth-century growth in litigation, involving disputes over seigneurial rights or rationalisation, as “a sure indication that the system was changing”.⁹ The number of records may in addition be a consequence of the nature of the foldcourse itself, and the complexities that followed from multi manorial settlements and field systems.

The second source for the data was the volumes produced by County Record Societies and other publications summarised in Appendix 2. A further bias towards East Anglia is a consequence of focussing on the volumes relevant to the area. The references occur primarily

⁸ SROB, 449/4/22

⁹ Bailey, *Sand into Gold*, 49.

in grants, leases and other similar documents which do not seem to have led to the sorts of disputes that make it into the archives as such – an example perhaps of regional differences in the nature of the relationship between lords, or lords and their tenants. A more limited exploration of the volumes of the Wiltshire and Sussex societies also generated a number of references but these were mostly confined to manorial flocks and the duties of customary tenants as opposed to freeholders who might have liberty of fold (see Appendix 1). Further examination of other county volumes might shift the apparent bias towards East Anglia but are beyond the scope of this work.

Table 2.1: Number of Archive References to the Foldcourse *et al* by County

COUNTY	FOLD-COURSE	LIBERTY OF FOLD, FOLDAGE	SHACK	HALF YEAR LAND	TOTALS
Norfolk	270	137	18	17	442
Suffolk	36	10	6		52
Cambridge	14	8			22
Essex	7	1			8
Cambridge/Essex	4	2			6
Cambridge/Suffolk		1			1
Sussex	6		1		7
Lincolnshire	3	2			5
Lincoln/Nottingham	1				1
Huntingdon		2			2
Monmouth	1				1
Bedford	1				1
Middlesex			1		1
Northampton		1			1
Nottingham		1			1
Somerset		1			1
Unknown	5	1	1		7
Totals	348	167	27	17	559

2. THE DISTRIBUTION OF THE FOLDCOURSE

The distribution of the references to the foldcourse will be examined both temporally and spatially, the latter being primarily through the use of the regional soil maps at both coarse and more detailed scales.

2.1 Distribution over Time

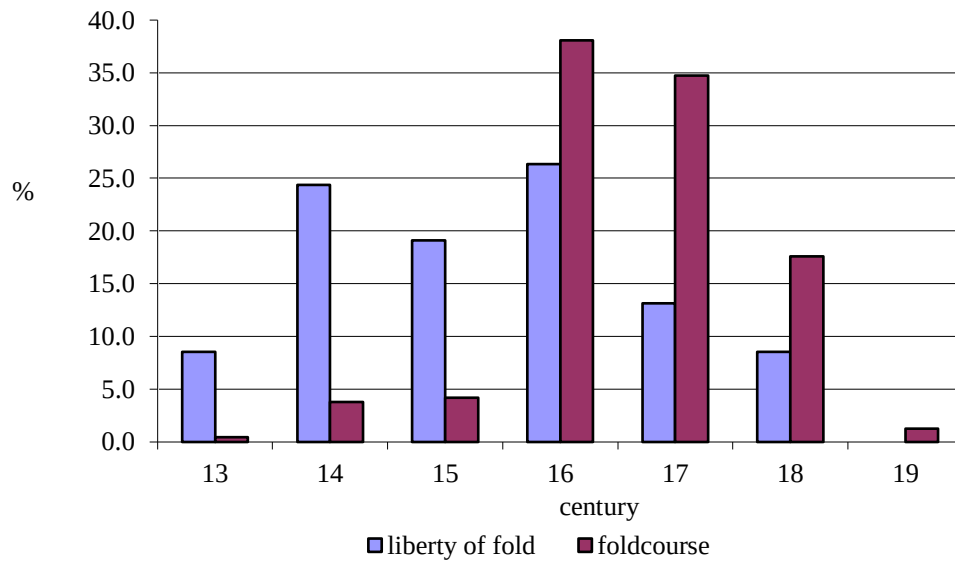
The first method of analysis was to examine the distribution of ‘foldcourse’ and ‘liberty of fold’ references over time, using the earliest dated reference at the given location. An overview (Fig 2.2) of the percentage distribution by century for both sets of data indicates that liberty of fold both preceded the foldcourse temporally and in quantity during the medieval period but that the latter rose rapidly during the sixteenth century and remained significant in the seventeenth (coinciding with the time frame of Allison’s original essay¹⁰) whilst the references to liberty of fold rapidly declined. Caution needs to be exercised with regard to the distribution over time, as will be discussed in the next chapter, because of the varied meanings and overlap of the terms employed in the references. The data for the seventeenth century and later also needs to be treated with care and in some cases at least indicate that the right is actually older – two examples, both related to foldcourses, illustrate the issue. At Flixton the document is dated 1775 but is claimed to be a copy of a 1544 grant related to the dissolution of Flixton Priory.¹¹ Similarly, at Haverhill a document of 1725 indicates that the rights in question may be descended from Castle Acre Priory.¹² The graph does also reinforce Bailey’s comment about the growth of litigation in the sixteenth century.

¹⁰ Allison, *Sheep-Corn Husbandry*, 12.

¹¹ SROL HA12/E1/12/62

¹² ERO, D/DGd T31

Fig 2.2: % Distribution of references by Century



2.2 Spatial Distribution by Soil Association

The second part of the analysis focuses on the spatial distribution of the references to foldcourses in East Anglia, against the soil associations mapped by The Soil Survey of England and Wales at 1:250,000 scale. A soil ‘association’ is “a group of topographically related soils developed in one geological parent material”.¹³ It consists of a number of soil ‘series’, each of which is defined by properties such as parent material, texture (e.g. coarse loamy over clayey) and mineralogy (e.g. calcareous).¹⁴ In an association one of the series will be predominant – commonly covering 60% or more of the area – and gives its name to the association. The remainder of the association will be composed of other soil series that may display differing characteristics, and therefore, alter the soil properties in a given location within the overall area of the association.¹⁵

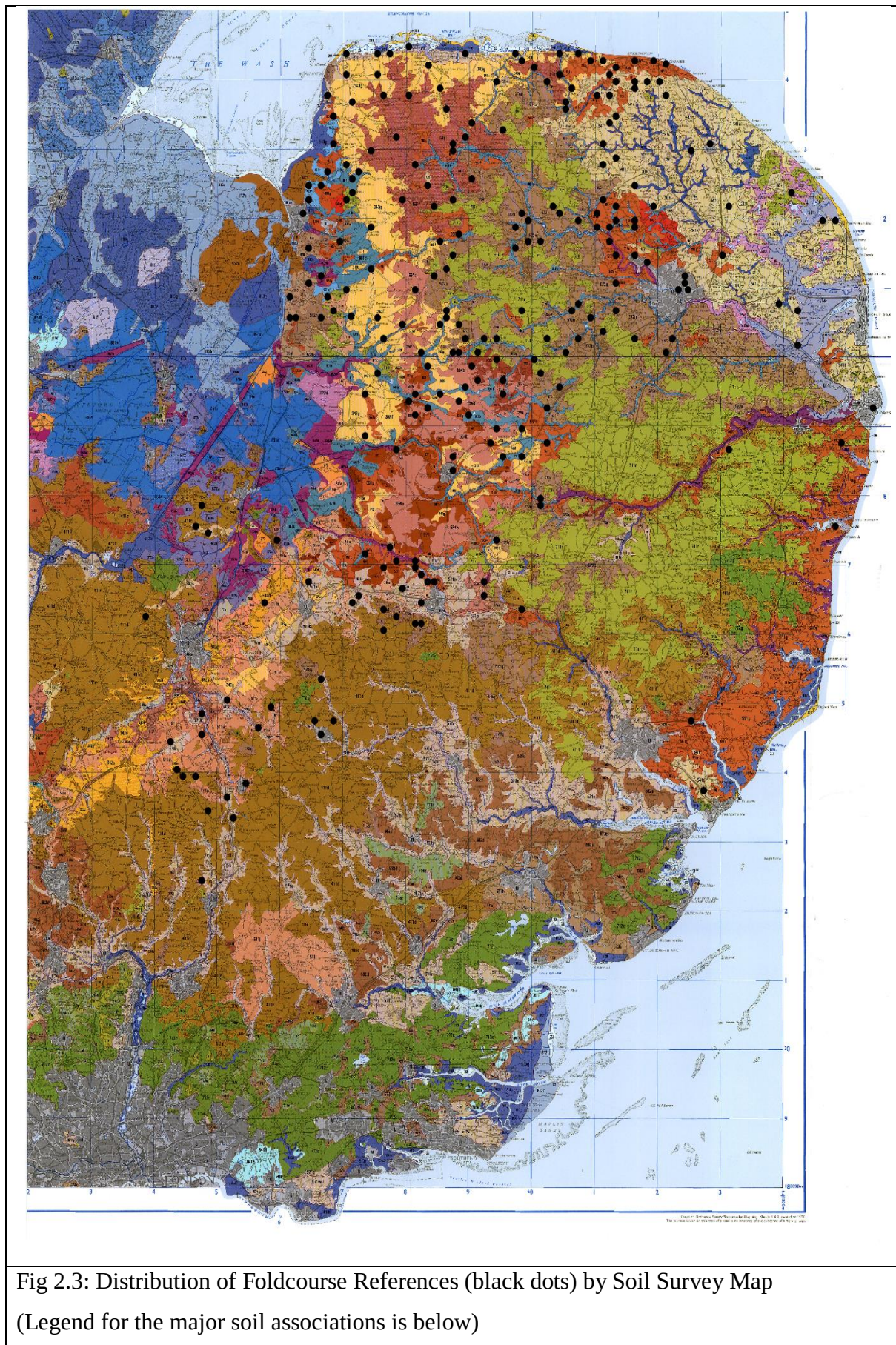
Sheep-corn husbandry is commonly seen as an integral component of farming in the light soil regions where such soils are prone to nutrient loss and leaching.¹⁶ However, soil fertility should

¹³ Curtis, L. F., Courtney, F. M. & Trudgill, S. T., *Soils in The British Isles*, London, (1976), 36.

¹⁴ : Hodge, C. A. H., Burton, R. G. O., Corbett, W. M., Evans, R. & Seale, R. S., *Soils and their Use in Eastern England*, Harpenden, (1984), 65

¹⁵ Curtis *et al.* 36.

¹⁶ Allison, Sheep-Corn Husbandry, 12; Kerridge, Common Fields, 80; Overton, 16



Legend	Association		Legend	Association	
	Group	Examples		Group	Examples
	343	Newmarket 1 & 2		554	Worlington
	411	Hanslope, Evesham		571	Moulton
	511	Swaffham Prior		572	Burlingham, Ashley
	521	Methwold		581	Barrow
	551	Newport		711	Beccles, Wickham

be seen as a spectrum with at one extreme the sandy, acid soils of areas such as Breckland and the Sandlings and at the other rich loams of areas such as the Isle of Flegg; where, as Campbell has demonstrated, a lot of effort went into maintaining the fertility of the soils through the application of manures from the farmyards and marshland sheepwalks, and marling.¹⁷ All soils therefore need maintenance to some degree through the input of manure or other materials to different degrees depending upon where they lie in the spectrum. The distribution of foldcourse references (Fig 2.3) clearly illustrates a broader distribution of foldcourses in relation to soil types than the traditional picture would suggest. The distribution by soil association can be divided into two distinct groups of light and heavier soils; a division based to a large degree on drainage and permeability differences between those soils which are light and free draining and a group of heavier, less permeable soils.

2.3 The Distribution of Foldcourses on Heavier Soils

The heavier more clayey soils are not commonly associated with sheep-corn husbandry as they hold the nutrients better and are not in need of regular folding their relative impermeability can also lead to water-logging in winter., which makes folding sheep on them problematic.¹⁸ However, such soils do form a significant minority (66 or 32%,) of the total. The majority of locations are on the Burlingham 1 and 3 associations (36 and 3 respectively), principally on the Norfolk claylands. The second largest group (14) is those locations on the Hanslope association. The remaining thirteen examples occur on a number of associations: Evesham

¹⁷ Campbell, B. M. S., 'Agricultural Progress in Medieval England: Some Evidence from Eastern Norfolk', *Economic History Review*, 36 (1983), 32, 33, 34

¹⁸ Hodge *et al.*, 49

3(411c); Ashley(572q); Wickham 2(711v); Beccles 1(711r) and Gresham(711v). All of which consist of clayey and loamy soils that are liable to waterlogging.¹⁹

The Burlingham 1 association (572n) consists of mainly non calcareous fine and coarse loamy soils with varied periods of seasonal waterlogging, whilst some are well drained. Burlingham 3(572p) soils are also fine and coarse loamy, but with slowly permeable sub soils, and more free draining in parts.²⁰ The Burlingham soils fringe those of the heavy clay Beccles 1 association (711r). Given that the latter is liable to prolonged waterlogging in winter²¹ and the susceptibility of sheep to foot and liver rot in wet and waterlogged ground, meant that folding was not viable on such soils. As the name indicates, the predominant soil in the Burlingham associations is the Burlingham series, but the presence of other series within the association, and within a given area, can cause a variation of soil properties – for example on slopes as opposed to plateaux, because of the change in drainage pattern. This leads to ‘islands’ where the soil, and what can most successfully be cultivated, shifts from that of the predominant series within the association to one of the other components. So, for example Burlingham 1 soils cover 615 square kilometres of Norfolk, mainly on the gentle slopes of the river valleys with the heavier clay soils of the Beccles association on the higher plateaux. The Burlingham 1 association contains, in addition to the predominant Burlingham and similar Ashley and Hanslope series, the Wick and Newport series – both of which are freer draining, sandy and loamy soils.²² The soils of the Hanslope association (411d) are clayey with a slowly permeable subsurface. They occur in north-east Essex and west Suffolk and whilst the predominant series within the association (Hanslope and Falkbourne) are clayey, neither is subject to serious waterlogging. The association also includes the well-drained Stretham series and in east Suffolk patches of light Newport soils.²³

The area of land covered by a soil association is, therefore, not uniform in its properties but more of a patchwork in which the predominant properties are modified by the presence of other series. Thus, the presence within the predominant loamy clayey soils of the Burlingham association of more free-draining soils may lead to greater nutrient loss, which if identified could be compensated for by manuring by sheep or other beasts. This can be illustrated by the

¹⁹ Ibid, 189, 96, 351, 204

²⁰ Ibid, 132, 136, 137

²¹ Ibid, 117, 118

²² Ibid, 132,133

²³ Ibid, 209, 210

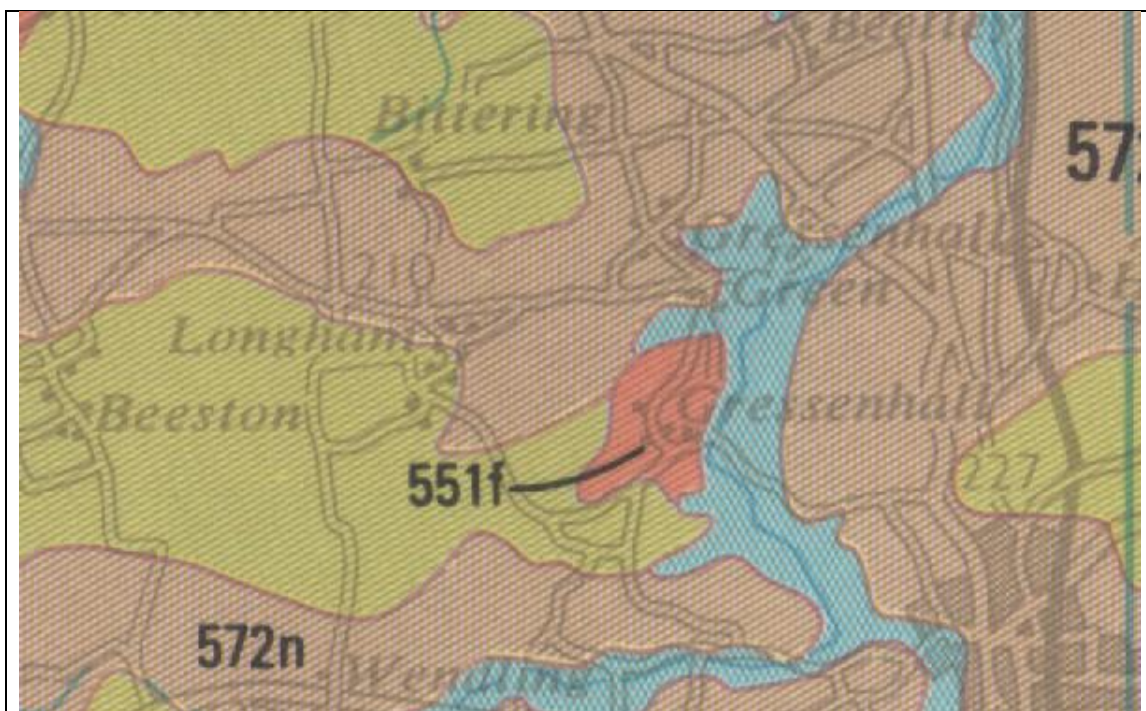


Fig 2.4: Soil Map of Gressenhall

(551f soils are Newport 3; 572n Burlingham 1; the green soils are Beccles 1, 711r)

example of Gressenhall on the boulder clay plateau of central Norfolk where the soils there have been characterised as not in need of “extensive manuring”. However, one of the manorial lords in the fourteenth century claimed right of fold and the tenants were paying *faldagium*.²⁴ The latter may be simply a money raising exercise but if one looks at the position of Gressenhall on the soil map (Fig 2.4) the usefulness of a fold of sheep becomes clearer, for whilst it is predominantly on the clays, it also includes an island of the light Newport soils (551f) – the fold being an asset both on the Burlingham and Newport areas. Martin and Satchell highlight a similar example at nearby Worthing where, in the north-west of the parish an area of “high, flat land” on Burlingham 1 soils, there was a foldcourse and an area labelled ‘Swanton brecks’.²⁵

²⁴ Williamson, J., ‘Norfolk: Thirteenth Century’, in *The Peasant Land Market in Medieval England*, ed Harvey P D A, Oxford, (1994), 33.

²⁵ Martin, E., Satchell, M. “*Wheare Most Inclosures be*”, *East Anglian Archaeology* 124, Ipswich, (2008), 92, fig 5

The occurrences of the foldcourse on the heavier soils may in part be an artefact of the way in which the distribution maps have been created, for whilst the bi-partite division above is, I would suggest reasonable, it is important to be cautious and not overly deterministic about the precise locations. The maps were created using GIS with grid references for each location sourced from Digimap²⁶ – the points on the map thus represent a particular grid reference, it is not the location of a foldcourse *per se* and in the great majority of cases is the present day location of the settlement. The soil descriptions above will thus, in many cases, represent only a part of the soils of a given township or parish.

2.4 The Distribution of Foldcourses on Light Soils

The association of foldcourse and light soils is explained by the relative poverty of those soils. In general, this impoverishment is brought about by their susceptibility to leaching whereby rainfall dissolves and breaks down minerals, and therefore nutrients, removing them from the upper layer soils and rendering those soils more acidic. These issues are at their most severe in Breckland where severe leaching and acidification due to the accumulation of humus at the surface, leads to podzolisation and the presence of poor acidic soils.²⁷ The group of ‘light soil’ references consists of 139 locations (68%). They occur, principally, in a broad arc from south Cambridgeshire and north east Essex, through the Brecklands, west Suffolk and Norfolk, along the north Norfolk coastal zone and the north Norfolk heathlands. All of the soils in this area are well drained, predominantly calcareous loamy and sometimes sandy. The following will examine each area in general, followed by a more detailed examination of the soils in south-east Cambridgeshire and Helhoughton in Norfolk.

South-east Cambridgeshire is part of the champion landscapes of the East Anglian Heights, which consist principally of well-drained calcareous soils.²⁸ It was, however, a very different ‘champion’ landscape to that of the Midland clays - being managed under a regime of sheep-corn husbandry relying on sheep flocks which grazed on the extensive heaths to maintain the fertility of the arable open fields.²⁹ The predominant soils of south-east Cambridgeshire and north-east Essex are of the coarse and fine loamy soils of the Swaffham Prior association (511e)

²⁶ <http://edina.ac.uk/digimap/>

²⁷ Hodge *et al.* 49

²⁸ Williamson, *Medieval Landscapes*, fig 22

²⁹ *Ibid*, 79

and the more calcareous soils of the Newmarket 2 association (343g), which occur together with patches of the similar Moulton association (571k) and all three soils associations are free draining.³⁰ The Swaffham Prior and Moulton associations are the predominant light soils of those parishes that will be examined in greater detail (Fig 2.7); whilst further to the east and south on the higher ground the predominant soils are those of the Hanslope association (411d) which are less free-draining, chalky till with a clay surface.³¹ This last association forms a significant portion of the soils to the east and south, bordering Suffolk and north-east Essex, including the group of co-axial parishes studied by Harrison with their broadly bi-partite division between the free draining soils to the west and the heavier Hanslope soils to the east.³²

Moving north-eastwards the soils of Breckland are in general poor, with locations such as Brandon, Elveden Icklingham and East and West Wretham lying on the well-drained, naturally acid and sandy Worlington association soils (554b), together with the slightly better well-drained, mainly calcareous, sandy on chalky drift soils of the Methwold association.(521).³³ Other parts of Breckland, such as Flempton, Hengrave and Tuddenham, were also on well-drained, often stony, sandy soils some of which are very acid such as Newport 4 (551g).³⁴ Weeting and Feltwell were on the better (comparatively speaking) well drained Newmarket 1 and 2 associations (343f & g) - the former being calcareous, coarse loamy & sandy, and the latter calcareous, coarse and loamy- and not dissimilar to the Good Sands region of Norfolk. Similarly, along the northern edge of the Brecks places such as Hilborough and Cressingham lay on a mixture of Worlington and Newmarket 1 soils.³⁵

The predominant soils of the Good Sands region were rather better than those of Breckland, for example Sedgeford, Bircham, Langham, and Massingham all lie on the coarse loamy and sometimes sandy Barrow (581f) and Newmarket 2 soils in varying proportions.³⁶ Other townships such as Hillington, Grimston and East Walton were also on Newmarket association soils but included patches of the heavier, alluvial Isleham 2 association (861b) to the west. The Rudhams, Shereford and Helhoughton are predominantly on Barrow soils and the poorer

³⁰ Hodge *et al*, 318, 269, 261

³¹ Hodge *et al*, 209

³² Harrison, S., 'Open Fields and Earlier Landscapes: Six Parishes in South-East Cambridgeshire', *Landscapes*, 3.1, (2002), 36

³³ Hodge *et al*, 368, 249

³⁴ *Ibid*, 277

³⁵ *Ibid*, 265-269

³⁶ *Ibid*, 107

Newport 4 soils which are sandy and sometimes acidic.³⁷ This group is discussed in greater detail in the next section. The inland parts of the coastal parishes north of Kings Lynn also lie on Newmarket soils whilst the coastal fringe are a mix of marine alluvial soils such as Wallasea 2 (813g), and Blackwood (821b), together with patches of sandy and acid Newport 4 (551g). Along the north Norfolk coast and behind the marine alluvial fringes, Ringstead, Burnham, Holkham were predominantly Newmarket soils; whilst further east at Felbrigg the soils were perhaps poorer with a mix of the sandy and sometimes acidic Newport 4 and Wick 3 which was coarse loamy and in places sandy.³⁸

2.5 Detailed Soil Surveys

Both south Cambridgeshire and north Essex and the area around Helhoughton (Norfolk), were the subject of detailed surveys by the Soil Survey and can thus provide a more complex picture than that of the apparent uniformity of the regional soil map at 1:250,000. The former were the subject of a 'reconnaissance survey' in the 1960s at 1 inch to 1 mile - 1:50,000 approximately (Fig 2.5). The parish of Fowlmere is named after a former mere in the parish, the soils of which the reconnaissance survey characterised as Rib association, an alluvial chalky clayey and chalky gravel soil that is often waterlogged for most of the year, and predominantly forms a ribbon of alluvial soils along the valleys of the rivers and streams.³⁹ The survey also commented on the many springs near Thriplow and Whittlesford and the associated chalky gleyed soils assigned to the Burwell series.⁴⁰ These soils probably underlie the low-lying basins or greens of a number of the other Cambridgeshire parishes and which were often associated with tributaries of the Cam, and used as pasture or meadow.⁴¹

A number of places in East Anglia have been surveyed and mapped at the finer scale of 1:25,000, including part of the Good Sands region covering Helhoughton, East and West Rudham, West Raynham and parts of Great Massingham, Weasenham St Peter and Weasenham All Saints. The survey was recorded by soil series not associations and thus provides a more detailed picture of the soil environment. In particular, the survey illustrates the

³⁷ Ibid, 277

³⁸ Ibid, 349

³⁹ Taylor, C., 'Nucleated settlement: a view from the frontier', *Landscape History*, 24, (2002), 65

⁴⁰ Thomasson, A. J., *Soils of the Saffron Walden District*, Harpenden, (1969), 19, 20

⁴¹ Taylor, Nucleated settlement, 67

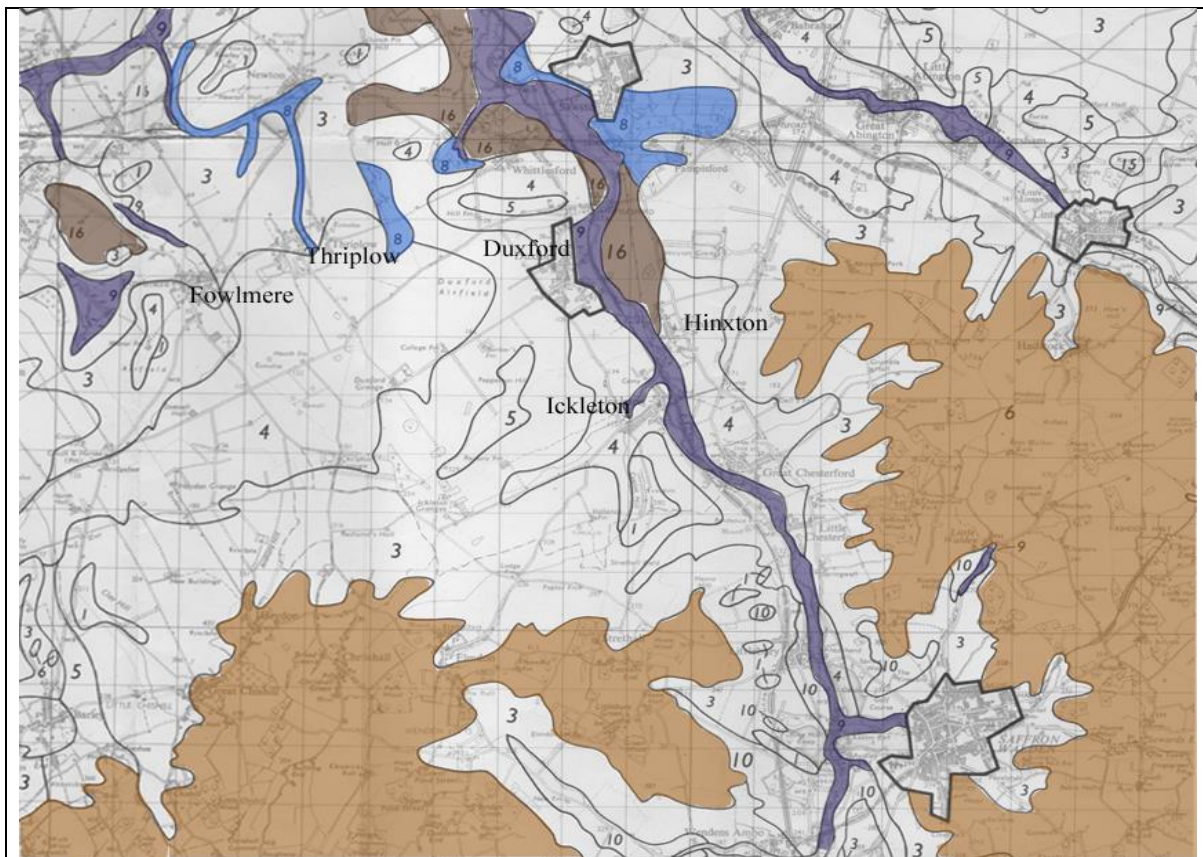


Fig 2.5: Soil Map (1:50,000 approx)⁴² of South-east Cambridgeshire. Areas coloured dark blue are Rib 'association; light blue – Burwell series; light brown – Hanslope association 411d; & dark brown – Milton Association 512f. The uncoloured areas are the light soils.

localised intermingling of soil types in the region - as the surveyor expressed it: “commonly the soil pattern is complex and heterogeneous units on the map are shown by combined symbols” – that is they were unable to separately map the series in question and reported them as a mixture of two series (Fig 2.6). Some areas were, by contrast, relatively homogeneous and are shown by a single symbol.⁴³ The Soil Survey is, of course, based on modern agronomic perceptions; but this localised variability would not have been news to earlier commentators. A description of Holkham park farm in 1851 said “the arable land is extremely variable, and almost every description of soil...in west Norfolk may here be seen...some good deep loams [elsewhere] the land becomes extremely light...on a sharp and hungry sub-soil.” The same commentator described the soil at Wicken farm Castle Acre as “thin and poor, resting chiefly upon chalk [and nearby] a somewhat stiff and retentive loam upon clay”.⁴⁴

⁴² Thomasson

⁴³ Corbett, W. M., *Soils in Norfolk VII Sheet TF 82 (Helhoughton)*, Harpenden, (1987), 7

⁴⁴ Quoted in Parker, R. A. C., *Coke of Norfolk*, Oxford, (1975), 84

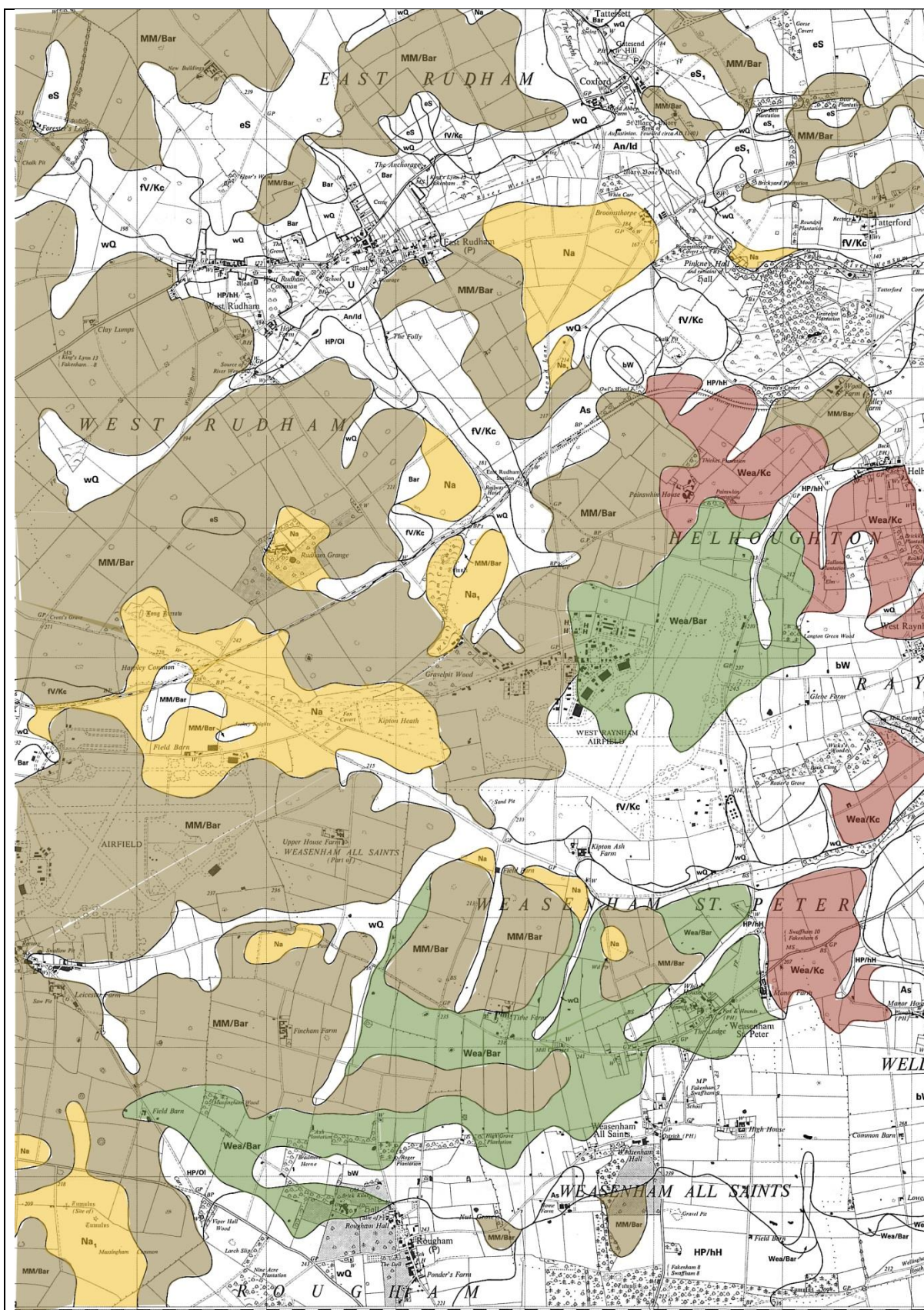


Fig 2.6: Helhoughton Soils. Brown: Maplestead and Barrow series; Sand: Newport series; Green: Weasenham and Barrow series; Pink: Weasenham and Kersten series

On the western part of the map (Fig 2.6) the predominant soils of the Rudhams and parts of Weasenham and Massingham is a mixture of the Maplestead and Barrow series. The former soils are deep well-drained coarse loamy and naturally acid; whilst the Barrow soils are well drained, loamy over clayey and also acidic – “regular liming is needed to maintain pH above 6”.⁴⁵ The other major series in the area is Newport, the soils of which are sandy and acidic – “uncultivated profiles in woods had pH of 5 or less” – well-drained with “small water holding capacity”.⁴⁶ The surviving commons of West Rudham and Massingham, and Kipton heath all, not surprisingly, lie on the Newport soils. To the east and underlying Helhoughton and parts of West Raynham and Weasenham the mixture of Maplestead and Barrow continues along with further mixtures, firstly of the Weasenham and Barrow series and secondly Weasenham and Kelstern. Weasenham series are well drained, fine loamy soils; whilst Kelstern soils are very shallow and very calcareous, well drained and with a high pH.⁴⁷

The mapping of the area at the coarser scale of 1:250,000 smooths out the variation described above: the predominant soils being the Barrow association (581f), the component series of which are Barrow (above), Maxted and Newport (above).⁴⁸ There is also a patch of Newport 4 association (551g), consisting of Newport and Redlodge series, located where the commons and heaths mentioned above are.⁴⁹ The coarser scale mapping is perhaps sufficient for modern agriculture with all the support of current methods and materials, though even today, as Corbett notes, crop yields on Newport series soils often suffer due to moisture stress.⁵⁰ The localised variation apparent at the finer scale would have been much more apparent to earlier farmers in these townships.

An alternative means of examining the local variability of soils is to consider the value applied to the lands. At Sedgeford c.1700, the arable lands were variously valued (per acre) as follows. Eaton farm, where the arable was predominantly open field: “lands of the better sort of infield” were 6s 8d and the “meaner sort” 3s 6d, whilst enclosed meadow, pasture and arable was 10s. On East Hall farm there were three ‘grades’: “the meaner sort” of arable was, as before, 3s 6d;

⁴⁵ Corbett, 22, 12

⁴⁶ Corbett, 23,24

⁴⁷ Corbett, 27, 21

⁴⁸ Hodge *et al*, 107

⁴⁹ Hodge *et al*, 277

⁵⁰ Corbett, 23,24

land described as “some part inclosed other part arable [presumably open field] was 6s 8d; and land that was “some part inclosed but not so good arable was 5s. North Ground farm had arable in Heacham field at 5s whilst enclosed land was 6s. For comparison, the brecks of East and West Hall farms were also 5s per acre.⁵¹ This mosaic pattern with regards to the quality of the soils could in regions such as Breckland and the Good Sands, lead to a similar fragmented pattern of land use, resulting in the variable cropping regimes and extended fallowing that are discussed in chapter 4.

2.6 Discussion

The spatial distribution clearly demonstrates that the foldcourse (or the use of the term) was not confined to its ‘traditional’ region on the light soils of western East Anglia. The distribution also throws up several anomalies. One is the apparent lack of references in the Sandlings region of east Suffolk, which is environmentally similar to the Breckland and Good Sands regions, and this anomaly will be examined in Chapter 4. The second, is the number of references to the foldcourse on the rich loamy soils of east Norfolk which is discussed in the following section.

⁵¹ NRO LEST/IB91

3. EAST NORFOLK

Regions such as east Norfolk and the Isle of Flegg are not commonly associated with the foldcourse; however there is a cluster of references (25) to the foldcourse on the loams of the Wick associations. The loamy Wick soils are, in terms of the spectrum of soil properties, predominantly of higher quality than the light soils described above and Wick 2 has been categorised as “some of the most valuable lands” in the county.⁵² The context of the foldcourse with regard to patterns of settlement and field systems will be discussed in Chapter 4; but it is worth noting here that east Norfolk was significantly different in both respects. In contrast to the loosely nucleated settlement of the west of the county, east Norfolk is an area dominated by dispersed settlement.⁵³ Furthermore, whilst in both regions of the county open fields continued to predominate well into the post-medieval period, the pattern of dispersed hamlets and isolated farms in the east suggests that, unlike the west, individual holdings were not evenly spread but concentrated close to the farmsteads to which they belonged, as for example at Worstead.⁵⁴ A proximity that increases the viability of using carts to transfer manure from farmyard to field and reduces the need for a fold.

Whilst the area is not true sheep-corn country, sheep were by no means absent – the Abbey of St Benet of Holme for example had large flocks at Horning and South Walsham in 1086; but large-scale sheep farming was restricted to those places that were close to extensive marshes or heath for grazing.⁵⁵ Manorial fold rights were, however, common with tenants required to place their sheep in the lord’s fold; and at North Walsham in the late twelfth century, Reginald the clerk paid “*pro faldagio iiij denarios*”.⁵⁶ This is however the only reference to fold rights in the published early records of the Abbey of St Benet. Eastern Norfolk was also an area where common rights were limited - often to no more than the feed available on the common field from the end of harvest until February or March - and to which the manorial flock was entitled.⁵⁷ Campbell characterises this right as liberty of fold and that it was “a diminutive” of the foldcourse; whilst, in eastern Norfolk, the rights associated with the foldcourse

⁵² Hodge *et al.* 349

⁵³ Roberts, B. K. Wrathnell, S., *Region and Place*, London, (2002), 160

⁵⁴ Wade Martins, Williamson, 18; Martin, Satchell, 86

⁵⁵ West, J. R., *St Benet of Holme, 1020 – 1210*, Norfolk Record Society III (1932) 224

⁵⁶ Campbell, Regional Uniqueness, 20, 23, 24; West, J. R., *St Benet of Holme, 1020 – 1210*, Norfolk Record Society II (1932) no 234

⁵⁷ Campbell, Regional Uniqueness, 20

arrangements of west Norfolk “did not apply”.⁵⁸ However, the liberty of fold as described is equivalent to the shack rights that were ubiquitous in the west of the county.

The Norwich Priory manor at Martham, whilst it did not have its own flock, did have a right of faldage but this seems to have been an occasional or poorly administered right. There is no record of how many tenants had to put their sheep in the lord’s flock or the number of sheep, and after 1272 faldage was not mentioned again in the accounts for three-quarters of a century.⁵⁹ The duty was revived in 1350, tenants being fined at this time for keeping sheep out of the lord’s flock; but the duty apparently fell, once more into desuetude after 1377. Some tenants were, however, running large flocks – one being fined for over-stocking the common with 200 sheep.⁶⁰ Manorial flocks were probably made up predominantly of the tenant’s sheep, whilst estates such as Norwich Cathedral priory or St. Benet’s abbey managed their flocks on an inter-manorial basis.⁶¹ Thus, the Priory’s principal source for restoring the fertility of the post-harvest demesne at Marham was the Priory flock that grazed on Fulholm marsh near Yarmouth. St Benet’s had by the late medieval period ‘foldcourses’ in Ashby, Thurne and Oby but Cornford suggests that the lord’s rights were, as in earlier periods, restricted to the post-harvest shack; and this example is also perhaps extending ‘foldcourse’ into a more general term for manorial rights over the flock.⁶² Similarly, the Bacon Papers refer to a foldcourse at Ingham in the 1580s.⁶³ The leases however refer not to a foldcourse but to “the shackle of sheepe letten to Sir Henry Woodhouse” for 40s in 1583, and the following year the shack was let “to the townsmen of Ingham” at the same annual rent.⁶⁴

Gimingham, on the north-east coast of Norfolk, was a soke and manor, and part of the Duchy of Lancaster estates.⁶⁵ The township flock contained both demesne and tenants’ animals; the receipts for foldage of the latter’s sheep in the lord’s fold in 1391/2 were 20s 11d, and the demesne had purchased, in the same year 120 sheep.⁶⁶ This situation continued into the fifteenth century - a lease of 1462 of the demesne lands of Gimingham manor included “the

⁵⁸ Ibid, 23, 22

⁵⁹ Cornford, B., *Medieval Flegg*, Dereham, (2002), 104

⁶⁰ Cornford, 150

⁶¹ Campbell, Regional Uniqueness, 24

⁶² Cornford, 105, 165

⁶³ Hassell Smith, *et al*, Bacon Papers, II, 254

⁶⁴ NRO MC 1156/6, 806x2; MC 1156/7, 806x2

⁶⁵ Hoare, C. M., *The History of an East Anglian Soke*, Bedford, (1918), 15

⁶⁶ Ibid, 141, 153

foldage for the sheep of the tenants of the lords there, to the said demesne lands belonging”.⁶⁷ By the end of the fifteenth century the medieval arrangements in the soke were fracturing. In 1493 one tenant in Northrepps paid for a licence to “have one enclosure of 24 hurdles, to put therein manure, only, for his own land next adjoining his messuage”.⁶⁸ An intriguing way of expressing a fold and indicative of the real purpose thereof – presumably the tathe itself did not need to be corralled. In the same year another tenant constructed a fold of 4 dozen hurdles without licence “to the great derogation of the King’s fold”; and, six years later, was continuing to do so with his own fold for 100 sheep.⁶⁹ Gimingham manor was leased again in 1549/50 with the same rights; but by 1583, a judgement of the Duchy court with regard to the manor had ‘translated’ the foldage rights into a foldcourse.⁷⁰ The 1583 agreement states that no farmer of the manor was to “have anie ffolde course nor bringe his nor anie other shepe to depasture in shackle tyme [not defined] or otherwise into any other ffeldes of the said manor but onely within the ffeldes of the townshippes of Gymingham, Trymingham and Mundesley on the north and north easte syde of the towne of Gymingham and into the ffield of Suthrepps and Trunche on the south and south weste...and then only wi[th]in, the poyntes and boundes hereafter menconed”. The judgement goes on to detail the bounds. The farmer’s flock was also limited to 400 sheep; and tenants who had land within the “ffold-course or shepe walke” may, given that “the ffermor doth shackle with them... lawfullie have shackle with all their great Cattell and Shepe as well upon ther owne lande wi[th]in the lymitte and bounds” and on the lands of the farmer within the limits of the foldcourse. These tenants were however stinted at the rate of 1 sheep for every acre they had within the shack. The agreement also specified that no new enclosures were to be made within the foldcourse without the consent of the farmer and other tenants; but that all enclosures made before the date of the agreement may remain, “without any leaving open [of them] at the time of shackle”. The tenants appear to have gained, by this agreement, some influence over the operation of the shack and retained any enclosures they had. Further, it was agreed that the farmer of the manor could only keep a warren on demesne lands in his occupation (easier said than done I would hazard), whilst the tenants were relieved of an imposed annual rent of 53s 4d and could, on their own lands, destroy any burrows and kill the rabbits - but not with nets or ferrets.⁷¹

⁶⁷ Ibid, 170

⁶⁸ Ibid, 217

⁶⁹ Ibid, 221,231

⁷⁰ Ibid, 238

⁷¹ Ibid, 331, 332

Carrow Priory held lands in Broadland and at Stow Bardolph in west Norfolk where they held the rectory with the lands and foldcourse appurtenant.⁷² The priory also held the manor of Wroxham where, perhaps based on its experience at Stow Bardolph, it appears, towards the end of the fifteenth century, to have changed the description of its fold arrangements, moved into sheep farming and perhaps created a foldcourse from the former arrangements. In 1484/5 the Priory's income included £2 5s from the Abbot of St Benet for farm of the great foldage in Wroxham and Salhouse and £1 2s 6d from the same source for farm of the above folds (*faldarum*). By 1529/30, the Priory was leasing various lands in Wroxham including the foldcourse, with the lessee also agreeing to pasture 100 sheep for the Prioress. The priory received a further £2 5s for the foldcourse in Salhouse.⁷³ The Priory had also significantly expanded its own involvement: there is no record of it having any sheep in 1456, but by 1485 they had 152, which number had increased to 624 in 1530, with three flocks at Wroxham, Salhouse and Carrow.⁷⁴ The rights pertaining to the manor of Wroxham with Salhouse continued to include the foldcourse, and were the subject of arguments and a court case in the 1850s. The bundle of documents includes one from 1766, claiming to quote from a decree of 1587, that the manor has a right of sheepwalk over several lands of the copyhold tenants and farmers of the manor from eight days after harvest until the feast of St Matthias (24th February). The tenants having the right of shackle for their great cattle over the same lands for the same period.⁷⁵

In the Isle of Flegg there were a number of attempts to impose foldcourse rights. In the first half of the seventeenth century at Clippesby the manorial lord attempted to convert, what others said were common shackle rights, into a foldcourse; and at nearby Ormesby open-field land had, by 1587, been enclosed with the tenants' agreement in order to prevent the imposition of foldcourse rights.⁷⁶ In 1689 there was a case in chancery with regard to claims of a sheepwalk in Thrigby. A number of witnesses however swore that there was no such right, including the son of Simon Brightmor who had sold the land in the west field of Thrigby to the claimant, and who said that his father "had no sheepes walks there but by leave". Other witnesses agreed that

⁷² Redstone, L. J., 'Three Carrow Account Rolls' *Norfolk Archaeology*, XXIX, (1946), 45

⁷³ *Ibid*, 46, 51

⁷⁴ *Ibid*, 86

⁷⁵ NRO TRAF 338, 89x3

⁷⁶ Whyte, *Perceptions of the Norfolk Landscape*, 194

such feeding was “by leave”; one saying that the said Simon’s “boy kept his sheepe there for pasturing...and the neighbours give me leave to keepe sheep upon their stubble”.⁷⁷

Overall, it is clear that in east Norfolk, the nature of the ‘foldcourse’ was different, and that it did not have the same impact as in the western parts of the county. To a large extent the limited rights associated with the fold, in particular the common right of shack, remained as such and was not used as a means to increase manorial control. In some places ‘foldage’ was translated into foldcourse. The question is whether this was simply a change in nomenclature – fashion even. In addition, ‘foldcourse’ is perhaps being used as a general term for various aspects of custom and practice related to the fold - as at Ingham where it is probable that nothing changed, although it is of note that it is the ‘townsmen’ who are taking over the shack. Similarly at Gimingham, whilst the customs of the manor appear to have been enforced, the agreement of 1583 is recognition of the rights not just of the farmer of the manor but also the tenants. At Wroxham and Salhouse, Carrow Priory clearly increased its interest in sheep farming at the end of the fifteenth century. To what extent they extended their manorial control is questionable. The examples from Flegg do however appear to be a more straightforward attempt to assert and extend manorial rights over custom. However, the ‘diminutive’ foldcourse of east Norfolk probably shared a common origin with the ‘full’ foldcourse that developed in the west of the county and those origins are the subject of the next chapter.

4. DISCUSSION

This chapter has demonstrated that the foldcourse is closely related to those regions of East Anglia that lie on lighter soils in particular need of regular inputs of manure. The foldcourse and its terminology, if not all of its elements, did spread to other areas of East Anglia where soils were generally of better quality, although this in many cases demonstrably occurred at a relatively late date. It is also clear that the foldcourse was part of the farming regime in parts of Cambridgeshire and north-east Essex that lie outside its traditional territory. This ‘spread’ raises a number of questions with regard to the context in which foldcourses developed which will be discussed in Chapter four and elsewhere.

⁷⁷ NRO Y/C 31/7/43

CHAPTER 3: THE ORIGINS AND EVOLUTION OF FOLDS AND THE FOLDCOURSE

1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter one focussed on the ‘classic’ foldcourse and mostly ignored its origins and evolution which are the subject of this chapter. The first section is devoted to Domesday Book and its use of the term ‘fold’; the evidence comes predominantly from East Anglia and is therefore drawn from Little Domesday. I will explore the possible meanings of its occurrence and the skewed distribution of the term. This will be followed by an exploration of the use and possible meanings of the various terms associated with the fold, such as foldage and liberty of fold, and their agricultural role. The final section is a more detailed examination of the folding arrangements in Holkham, Walsham le Willows and Saffron Walden in the medieval period. I will, however, begin with a brief examination of the various terminologies employed with regard to the fold.

1.1 Terminologies

One definition of the fold is: “the sheep contained in a fold. Also the moveable fold and the sheep penned in it”.¹ The fold, in the sense of a physical structure was a temporary enclosure consisting of moveable hurdles. The fold, or more accurately the benefit of the fertility thereof was a significant and valuable property, or as Maitland expressed it: “the demand for manure has played a large part in history”.² The very fact that it had a value meant that the fold and its ‘benefits’ were entangled with ownership and rights. But they were rights that could be enforced, abused and alienated; they were property and a “jealously guarded [and] valuable asset” by the twelfth century.³ The references to the fold in Domesday appear primarily in the term foldsoke (*soca faldae*) which Maitland, in a memorable phrase, characterised soke as the genus of which foldsoke was one species, foldsoke being the most prominent of the services or payments that “the lowly free men and sokemen of East Anglia” made. Foldsoke was the requirement for the tenant to put his sheep into the lord’s fold and not have a fold of his own.⁴ It has

¹ OED on line

² Maitland F W, *Domesday Book and Beyond*, Cambridge, (1921), 76

³ Bartlett, R., *England under the Norman and Angevin Kings*, 309, Oxford, 2000.

⁴ Maitland, 85, 76

also been defined by Roffe as “a due that was rendered for use of the Lord’s fold”; the latter requiring that his tenants’ sheep were put in his fold in order to fertilize his pasture – although in fact it is the arable that was more likely the principal concern.⁵ More generally, this author goes on to suggest that foldsoke was associated with commendation and *must be* (my italics) “related to the warranting of title”; that is confirming the ownership of livestock whereby the foldsoke guaranteed the owner’s rights to livestock kept in the fold. This description, as it relates to warranty, separates the land, which Maitland saw as the principal need for warranty, from the stock that it supports. Foldsoke is thus in essence, as described by Roffe, a jurisdictional or legal term; as he has written elsewhere – the association of commendation and foldsoke in East Anglia emphasises the judicial element.⁶

Foldsoke appears to be used infrequently in subsequent documents. It does appear in a grant of 1375 from Shernborne which includes *faldi socam* – transcribed as a “sheepwalk” by the editor.⁷ Other examples are further away from its Domesday origins - at Docking a quitclaim includes right in half a foldsoke – a shift away from a duty to a right more akin to faldage.⁸ By the sixteenth century, according to the OED, faldage or foldage were defined as “an old privilege by which a lord of the manor could set up folds in any fields within the manor, in which his tenants were obliged to put their sheep” although the dictionary also defines foldage, in a more generic sense, as “the practice of feeding sheep in moveable folds”.⁹ *Faldagium* is the term employed in the early records of Norwich Cathedral Priory where there are references to Bishop Losinga’s manor of Gnatington having a foldcourse (*faldagiis*) prior to 1119.¹⁰ But in a subsequent entry, the same word is translated as “faldage”.¹¹ Faldage was probably widespread as a manorial right: it was, for example, common on all of the demesnes of the abbeys of Ely and Ramsey.¹²

⁵ Roffe D, *An Introduction to the Norfolk Domesday*, Aleto Digital Domesday

⁶ Roffe, D., *Domesday The Inquest and the Book*, Oxford, (2000), 29 fn 53

⁷ Bullock, J. H., ed. *The Norfolk Portion of the Chartulary of Lewes Priory*, Norfolk Record Society, XII, (1939), doc 106

⁸ NRO BL/MD/3/1

⁹ OED, on line

¹⁰ Millican, P., ed, *The First Register of Norwich Cathedral Priory*, Norfolk Record Society, XI, (1939), 4, 14

¹¹ Millican, 63

¹² Postgate, M. R., *The Open Fields of Cambridgeshire*, Unpublished PhD Thesis, Cambridge University, (1964), 236

The various expressions such as foldsoke, foldsuit, *faldagium*, faldage and foldage appear, over time, to have been used in an increasingly indiscriminate fashion and to have become synonymous. For example, *faldagium* appears to have shifted its meaning over time. Thus at Holkham, by the latter half of the thirteenth century, it is described as a tax for the “right of participation in the seigneurial fold”; but what is the right? ¹³ Foldsoke had been the requirement to put one’s sheep in the lord’s fold, has payment (*faldagium* in this case) replaced it? The money payment is perhaps connected to the move away from labour services; Kosminsky, includes *faldagium* in a group of what he characterises as “petty rents”.¹⁴ If that was the case the payment is unlikely to be voluntary although it is unclear whether the tenant received any benefit. It is perhaps recognition that the fold went on both the demesne and the tenants’ strips as may be indicated by the money payment being graduated by the size of the tenant’s landholding.¹⁵ Further afield, on the estates of Burton Abbey in the early twelfth century tenants could commute, for 7d, what Lennard labels as foldsoke. He also describes how, on the same estates, tenants were required to “fallow an acre ‘*propter faldam*’, and suggests that this was a service that the tenant ‘paid’ for the freedom from the obligation to put their sheep in the lord’s fold.¹⁶ The reference also implies that the tenants had sufficient sheep to carry out the ‘service’. Hudson provides a similar example from Shropham (Norfolk) in 1298-99, writing in a footnote of the obligation to put sheep in the lord’s fold but that licence might be obtained at 1d per eight animals – presumably a licence not to put one’s sheep in the fold.¹⁷ Payments in some form or another were ubiquitous and one form that appears common in parts of East Anglia was the temporary fold which was valid for a fixed time. Bailey describes them as uncommon in Breckland, but they were employed at Walsham le Willows and Holkham - discussed below.¹⁸

¹³ Hassall, W. & Beauroy, J., eds, *Lordship and Landscape in Norfolk 1250-1350*, Oxford, (1993), 48

¹⁴ Kosminsky, E. A., ed Hilton, R. H., *Studies in the Agrarian History of England in the Thirteenth Century*, Oxford, (1956), 168

¹⁵ Hassall & Beauroy, 49

¹⁶ Lennard, R., *Rural England 1086-1135*, Oxford, (1959), 377

¹⁷ Hudson, W., ‘Three Manorial Extents of the Thirteenth Century’, *Norfolk Archaeology*, XIV (1901), 29.

¹⁸ Bailey, *Marginal Economy*, 70

2. DOMESDAY AND THE FOLD

The term ‘fold’ appears a number of times in the Domesday Book and this section will examine these references in two ways. Firstly, it will consider foldsoke in terms of the jurisdictional and feudal relationships between lords and tenants; and secondly, it will attempt to elucidate their spatial distribution. The analysis is based on using the digital Alecto version of Domesday using ‘fold’ as the search term. Fold occurs 57 times in the survey and the simplest examples are its use in a specific agrarian context with reference to sheep folds: one in Gloucestershire, “from the sheep fold 20 weys of cheese”; the other from Huntingdonshire: “a sheep fold for 662 sheep.”¹⁹ The remaining 55 occurrences are confined to East Anglia: 40 in Norfolk and 15 in Suffolk. These references are not overtly agrarian but rather have a much closer association with jurisdiction and the feudal relationships between lords and men. ‘Fold’ occurs in a number of similar phrases, the commonest being ‘foldsoke’ but also ‘suit of fold’, ‘right of fold’ and ‘belonging to the fold’. The requirement to put one’s sheep in the lord’s fold applied to all bond or customary tenants, but there were tenants of different status with varying rights or duties with regard to the fold and these are discussed in the following sections.

2.1 Freeman and Sokemen

In all cases the Domesday references to fold in East Anglia relate to freemen (*liberi homines*) or sokemen (*sochmanni*); and it was their social and legal, rather than economic, status that the freemen and sokemen were differentiated from other groups of the peasantry.²⁰ The two were “in theory, if not practice, distinct” and distinguished in the Domesday survey by the different methods used to record the value of their holdings.²¹ The land of the sokemen was commonly recorded in the valuation of the manor, whereas that of the freemen was commonly recorded separately; thus their status is a reflection both of the structure of the estate and of their relationship with it.²² Sokemen therefore owed customary dues or services to the estate to which they were

¹⁹ Alecto Digital Domesday, GDB, f 169; f 206v, Library, University of East Anglia

²⁰ Hadley, D. M., *The Northern Danelaw*, London, (2000), 183

²¹ Skipper K, Williamson T, ‘Late Saxon Social Structure’, in *An Historical Atlas of Norfolk* ed Wade Martins P, Norwich, (1994), 40

²² Dodwell, B., ‘The Free Peasantry of East Anglia in Domesday’ *Norfolk Archaeology*, 27, (1939), 146; Faith, R., *The English Peasantry and the Growth of Lordship*, Leicester, (1997), 122

‘attached’ and probably paid their taxes through the estate. Freemen by contrast were usually recorded separately rather than as an appendix to an estate, paying their own taxes and attending the hundred court, and the wealthier among them were recorded individually in 1066.²³ In the Domesday entries for Norfolk the two groups – freemen and sokemen – were usually “scrupulously distinguished”; however, in Suffolk the distinction between the two groups appears to be less consistent, with the Abbey of Bury St Edmunds ‘re-classifying’ many of its tenants who had previously been sokemen in The Feudal Book of Abbot Baldwin as freemen in 1086.²⁴

The two groups formed a significant element of the population in Domesday, occurring predominantly in eastern England, with 96% of the freemen to be found in Norfolk and Suffolk.²⁵ There was, however, in these two counties a significant difference in terms of the distribution: Dodwell calculates that, in Suffolk, there were 8144 freemen and 1003 sokemen in 1066; by contrast, in Norfolk, the split was more even with 5544 and 5651 respectively and together they made up approximately 40% of the population of each county.²⁶ The Suffolk freemen were primarily concentrated in the east of the county, and the sokemen in the hundreds to the west within the Liberty of St Edmund and the south-eastern hundred of Samford.²⁷ The evidence for the distribution of these two groups in Norfolk is discussed below.

Sawyer has suggested that freedom in Domesday had “a special meaning” and points to the fact that those, such as bishops, who enjoyed the widest possible freedom are never described as such, and further that a literal interpretation of freedom in Domesday would suggest that pre-Conquest England was a land of “social anarchy”.²⁸ Thus, phrases such as ‘sake, soke and customary due’ and ‘commendation and foldsoke’ indicate the degree to which the people being so characterised were ‘free’ and the degree to which their freedom had been circumscribed by the duties or services that they had to render.

²³ Williamson, *Origins*, 117

²⁴ Williamson, T., *Environment, Society and Landscape in Early Medieval England*, Woodbridge, (2012), 108, 109

²⁵ Hadley, 22, 180

²⁶ Dodwell, 148, Warner, P., *The Origins of Suffolk*, Manchester, (1996), 195

²⁷ Dodwell, 148; Martin, E., ‘Hundreds and Liberties’ in *An Historical Atlas of Suffolk*, ed Dymond, D., Martin, E., (1999), Ipswich, 27

²⁸ Sawyer P, ‘1066-1086: A Tenurial Revolution’, in *Domesday Book – A Reassessment*, ed Sawyer P, London, 1985, 78, 79

Maitland suggests that there were, in the late eleventh century, three different bonds between a man and his lord: the tenurial, the personal, and that which was jurisdictional.²⁹ The first – the tenurial bond – was the feudal doctrine of dependent land holding: land being held in return for service and every parcel of land that was not royal demesne can be listed in Domesday under a tenant-in-chief.³⁰ The second of these, and in Maitland's view the weakest, was the personal, represented in Domesday by commendation; whereby the man expressed his fealty and allegiance to the lord, gaining in return protection and warranty, and in particular the warranty of his possession of the land that he held.³¹ Commendation however did not automatically give the lord rights in that land, and had no "necessary implication of tenurial involvement".³² Commendation also allowed a freeman or sokeman to form a "social bond" with a lord other than his soke lord.³³ Maitland, however, took the view that in commending himself a man had in some degree acquired a landlord.³⁴ In Roffe's view commendation was a relationship of which Domesday took little account; and thinks that to the Normans it was natural that a lord or his successor was entitled to the land of his men.³⁵ Thus, to the Norman lord those who had been commended - that is in a personal relationship with his predecessor - were also in a tenurial relationship with that predecessor and thus with themselves.³⁶

The jurisdictional link – soke (*soca*), or soke rights - encompassed the duty of a man to seek the lord's court and of the lord to keep a court.³⁷ It had probably developed from earlier systems associated with 'extensive lordship' and 'multiple estates'; but by the eleventh century soke rights had two aspects: jurisdictional, that is the right of a lord to collect judicial fines (the profits of justice) from those who owed him soke; and customary dues (*consuetudines*), which consisted of a variety of works, services and 'seigneurial monopolies' owed to the lord – including foldsoke.³⁸ The Domesday

²⁹ Maitland, 67

³⁰ Maitland, 151

³¹ Maitland, 68, 69, 72

³² Maitland, 70; Roffe, *Inquest*, 28

³³ Hadley, 176, 170

³⁴ Maitland, 72

³⁵ Roffe, *Inquest*, 28

³⁶ Williamson, *Shaping Medieval Landscapes*, 48.

³⁷ Maitland, 85

³⁸ Baxter, S., *The Earls of Mercia*, Oxford, (2007), 210, 211

entries for East Anglia demonstrate that soke was commonly associated with sake - the latter meaning cause or dispute in a legal sense.³⁹ Maitland saw the term soke and sake as “an alliterative jingle like judgement and justice”.⁴⁰ Roffe however sees soke and sake as encompassing a greater degree of lordly rights in contrasts to the “limited dues conferred” by soke alone. Soke (and jurisdiction) was combined with rights over land (*terra*) but not in it, and where the two rights were held by the same lord, the combination was known as soke and sake.⁴¹ Other authors express a similar view that sake and soke included various customary services (*consuetudines*) that were associated with the land which belonged to the holder and not the lord; and that where a lord held both land and its soke, soke and sake was indicative of jurisdiction and tenure.⁴²

These three relationships - commendation, tenorial and jurisdictional - were both inter-related and overlapped in a variety of ways depending upon the nature of the relationship between an individual freeman or sokeman and the lord or lords to whom he was commended, of whom he held his land and to whom he owed soke. These three bonds could be held of one lord but such a situation was rare and two separate bonds were more common, as in soke and sake – but other permutations were possible.⁴³ There was, in general, a significant shrinkage in numbers of sokemen in northern and eastern England between 1066 and 1086 as the Normans ‘took control’; in Norfolk and Suffolk, however they survived in larger numbers but probably as tenants paying rent to the lord; and as a group they ‘disappeared’ over time becoming absorbed into those of villein status.⁴⁴

³⁹ Hadley, 168

⁴⁰ Maitland, 84.

⁴¹ Roffe, *Inquest*, 31,32

⁴² Williams, A., ‘Little Domesday and the English’, in *Domesday Book* eds Hallam, E. & Bates, D, (2001) Stroud, fn 45 209; Hadley, 168

⁴³ Baxter, Mercia 212, 213

⁴⁴ Faith, 215, Skipper & Williamson, ‘Late Saxon Social Structure’, in *An Historical Atlas of Norfolk* ed. Wade Martins P, Norwich, 1994, 41

2.2 The Domesday Entries

All of the Little Domesday entries for the various expressions of fold are collated in Tables 3.1 and 3.2, and indicate both a range of services and dues owed by tenants, and changes over the period following the Norman Conquest. The entries divide into distinct groups: the manors and other estates of the Abbey of Bury St Edmunds; the entries for Norfolk; and those estates in Suffolk not held by the Abbey. The Abbey's holdings (Table 3.1) appear as a group both more coherent and suggestive of centralised organisation or planning when compared to the remaining East Anglian entries. The Abbey held lands in twelve locations where the term fold is used; of these, eight were manors and the commonest expression of the relationship between the Abbey (as tenant in chief) and the tenants was that the abbot "had the commendation, sake and soke and customary dues and that all belong to the fold". This description applied to virtually all of the 322 tenants on the eight manors who were either freemen (212) or sokemen (110). By contrast, at four of the same manors (Risby, Fornham St Martin, Stanton and Rickinghall Inferior) freemen were separately identified and their services were less prescriptive: St Edmund having "sake and soke and commendation"; and they presumably did not belong to the fold. At the four entries that were not manors of St Edmunds, the Abbey had the commendation and soke (but not sake) over 136 freemen. The Abbey had foldsoke - expressed as belonging to the right of fold – over all bar ten, whilst the soke remained with St Edmunds - but at Woolpit (which was a berewick) and Hessett this freedom was specified as being in 1066 and not 1086. Clearly at these two villis the Abbey had in the intervening period been able to diminish their 'freedom'; also at Woolpit, the soke is described in jurisdictional terms as being over the land. With regard to the fold, the most significant entries are those concerning fold rights. At Risby one sokeman had a fold for himself and in Great Barton three out of the 70 freemen did not belong to the fold. In the four villis that were not manors, the freemen who did not belong to the fold formed less than 10% of the total: six in Hessett; three in Rushbrooke and one in Stowlangtoft.

Table 3.1: Occurrences of “fold” in the lands of Abbey of Bury St Edmunds
(vills in bold are manors)

Vill	Freemen (f) or Sokemen (s) numbers	Status	Folio
Risby	7s	St Edmund had the sake & soke, commendation and all customary dues. And they could not give or sell the land without the abbot’s consent. All also belong to the fold except 1 who had a fold for himself	356v
	1 freeman	He could give and sell the land but the sake & soke and commendation belonged to St Edmund.	
Great Barton	70 f	St Edmund has and had sake and soke and every customary due. They all belong to the fold apart from 3.	361v
Pakenham	31 f	All belong then as now to St Edmund with sake and soke and every customary due They belong to the fold.	361v
Fornham St Martin	10 f	All belong entirely to St Edmund with every customary due and to the right of fold	362
	1 f	This man could give and sell the land, the sake & soke and commendation continued to belong to St Edmund	
Rougham	90 f	These men belong then and now to St Edmund with commendation and every customary due and with regard to the fold	362
Ingham	21 s	All belong to St Edmund with the sake and soke and all customary dues, also as to the right of fold. Neither could they give or sell without the abbot’s consent	364
Stanton	60 s	These belong to St Edmund and they were commended with sake and soke and every customary due and with regard to the right of fold. Nor could they ever give or sell their land without the abbot’s permission	364v
	7 freemen	These men could give and sell their land but the commendation, soke and service belonged to St Edmund.	
Rickingham Inferior	22 s	These men are commended to St Edmund by sake and commendation and every customary due. Nor could they ever give or sell their land without permission. All belong to the fold	364v
	2 freemen	These could give and sell their land but the sake and commendation and service continued to belong to St Edmund.	
Woolpit (held as a berewick)	40 f	All these could give and sell their land TRE but the soke always belonged to St Edmund over the land and every service with regard to the right of fold.	362v
Hessett	60 f	These men could give and sell their lands TRE but the soke belongs to St Edmund and owe every service in Rougham. All belong to the right of fold apart from 6.	362v
Rushbrooke	22 f	These men could give and sell their land but the soke belongs to St Edmund and the service in Rougham. They all belong to the right of fold apart from 3.	363v
Stowlangtoft	14 f	These men could give and sell their land. However the soke and commendation continued to belong to St Edmund. All belong to the fold except 1.	365

Ecclesiastical lords have been characterised as taking a more aggressive approach in attempting to control or diminish the comparative freedoms of their tenants - most imposed upon their sokemen the requirement to seek permission to give and sell their land and incorporated their land into a manor. Ely has been described as predatory in its relations with its freemen.⁴⁵ The Abbey of St Edmund was fiercely protective of its rights that had originated in grants from Edward the Confessor and which promised the ‘sake and soke as completely as my mother held them’, Edward’s mother (Emma) having held the eight and half hundreds of west Suffolk within which the abbey’s lands in Domesday are situated.⁴⁶ Baldwin who was the abbot at the time of the conquest and was still abbot in 1086 has been described as ‘skilled and determined in defending the Abbey’s rights and properties’ – the foregoing would suggest that acquisition was employed as part of the defence.⁴⁷ The entries for the other Suffolk locations where the term fold was used do not fit the patterns described above and are much more akin, in terminology, to the results for Norfolk and are therefore summarised in table 3.2. Two of the three were manors and fourteen of the freemen held by commendation and foldsoke, one by commendation only and one by commendation, foldsoke and other services – a microcosm of the variety displayed in Norfolk.

There were a number of Norfolk villis where the freemen’s relationship with the lord was limited to the personal. At Hales there were three freemen described as ‘in commendation only’; at Keswick nine of the fourteen freemen were so described; and at East Carleton there were four freemen with commendation. At Hellington, six out of twelve freemen are simply described as ‘free’ and perhaps owed no fealty to any lord except the King. At Fincham there is an example of the Norman attitude to commendation, described by Roffe, whereby it included ‘by definition’ a tenurial relationship, twelve men are described as having been “free except for commendation” in 1066, but not 1086. Table 3.2 contains numerous examples of freemen who were characterised as holding “by soke of the fold and commendation” - this expression is used in 31 villis and includes 280½ men of whom only four were sokemen. The phrase “soke of the fold and commendation” often appears with ‘only’ appended, presumably

⁴⁵ Roffe *Inquest*, 31, 23

⁴⁶ Marten L., ‘The Shiring of East Anglia: An Alternative Hypothesis’, *Historical Research*, 81, (2008), 21

⁴⁷ Baxter, S., ‘The Representation of Lordship and Land Tenure in Domesday Book’ in *Domesday Book* eds Hallam, E. & Bates, D, Stroud, (2001), 93

Table 3.2: Occurrences of “fold” in Norfolk and Suffolk excluding the lands of the Abbey of Bury St Edmunds (vills in bold are manors)

Vill	Tenant in Chief	Freemen (f) or Sokemen (s) numbers	Status	Folio
Kirby Bedon	The King	12 f	Follow the fold of Eadric	124
Wickhampton	The King		Over all who used to resort to the fold of the Earl he had sake and soke	129v
Bedingham	The King	6 s	with all customary dues TRE now 26 of whom Earl Ralph added 20 with soke of the fold.	130v
Raveningham	The King	10 f	In soke of the fold and commendation	135v
Hudeston	Roger Bigod	11	In commendation and soke of the fold TRE. They could sell their land but dues remained in the manor	181v
East Carleton	Roger Bigod	27½ f	by commendation only and soke of the fold TRE. Also 4 freemen with commendation.	187v
East Carleton (Walsingham)	Roger Bigod	6 f	by soke of the fold and commendation only	187v
East Carleton (Walsingham)	Ralph Banyard	13 f	in soke of the fold and commendation only TRE	254
East Carleton	Ralph Banyard	9 f	in soke of the fold and commendation only	254
		1 f	in commendation only	254
Gt Melton	Godric	9 f	in soke of the fold and commendation only	204
Gt Melton	Ranulf Peverel	6 f	in soke of the fold TRE and commendation only	254v
Lt Melton	Godric	12 f	in commendation only and soke of the fold.	204v
Flordon	Roger Bigod	15 f	by soke of the fold and commendation only.	187v
Bracon Ash	Roger Bigod	1 f	by soke of the fold and commendation only.	187v
Wreningham	Roger Bigod	9 f	by commendation only and soke of the fold.	187v
Wreningham	Hermer	8 f	To this same land belong ...in soke of the fold and commendation only	208v
Keswick	Roger Bigod	14 f	9 by commendation only and 5 by commendation and soke of the fold.	188v
Beighton	Bishop William	Now 29 bordars, 14s	With sake and soke over the bordars and those who owe suit to the fold	194v
Hellington	Godric	12 f	6 in soke of the fold, 6 free	203v
Hethersett	Godric	9 f	in commendation only and soke of the fold.	204v
Reedham	Abbot of Ramsey		Abbot of St Benet used to have the soke over those who followed the fold and the soke of the others belonged to the hundred	216

Thurketelliart (Aldeby)	Ralph de Beaufour	15 f	in fold and commendation	230
Aldeby	Ralph de Beaufour	15 f	in soke of the fold and commendation	230
Tibenham	Eudo Fitzspirewic	26	in soke of the fold and commendation and they would be able to sell their land but after they had offered it to their lord.	246v
Kirby Cane	Ralph Banyard	8 f	in soke of the fold and commendation	249v
Hales	Roger Bigod	13 f	In soke, right of fold and commendation	181v
Hales	Ralph Banyard	12 f	in soke of the fold and commendation	250
		3 f	in commendation only	250
Wheatacre	Ralph Banyard	7 f	in soke of the fold and commendation	250
Wheatacre	Ralph Banyard	6 f	in soke of the fold and commendation TRE	250
Ketteringham	Ranulf Peverel	4 f	in soke of the fold and commendation only	254v
Fritton	Robert Fitzcorbucion		There is soke of the fold and there are 7 men who could sell their land if they had first offered it to their lord	260
Stoke Holy Cross	Tovi		5 men in commendation and soke of the fold TRE	264v
Barton Bendish	Hermer	7 f	in soke of the fold and commendation only	205v
Hoe	St Aethelthryth	2 s	The soke is in Mileham (a royal manor) The abbot had the commendation and soke of the fold	214
Gateley	Peter de Valognes	2 s	Predecessor had soke of the fold and commendation	256v
Ingoldisthorpe	Peter de Valognes	3 f	Predecessor had soke of the fold and commendation	256v
Toomers	Reginald Fitzivo	3 f	in soke of the fold and commendation	230v
Fincham	Annexation of Hermer of Ferrers	20 f	12 were free except for commendation TRE, 8 were customary tenants at the fold of his predecessor	273v
West Briggs	Annexation of Hermer of Ferrers	11 f	Of 3 his predecessor had only customary rights, 8 with customary dues and soke of the fold	273v
Thorpland (near Downham Market)	Annexation of Hermer of Ferrers	16½	8½ free men and there were 8 customary tenants at the fold of his predecessor	273v
Gt & Lt Snarehill	William de Warenne	3 f	in commendation and soke of the fold. The soke is in Kenninghall (royal manor)	277v
<i>Suffolk</i>				
Aldringham	Robert Malet	1 f	By commendation and fold soke and other services	310v
Barningham	Peter de Valognes	6 f	By foldsoke and commendation	421
Rushford	Peter de Valognes	8 f	By commendation. Over 7 foldsoke, over 1 commendation only	421

as an indication of the comparative freedom of those so identified - foldsoke being often the only definite service that the lord received from his freemen. These freemen were, however, one step less free than a neighbour (as above) who was not so bound.⁴⁸ In six of the 31 villis the expression is again qualified by being "*Tempus Rex Edwardius*", a further indication in the shifts of the status of freemen following the conquest.

In a number of villis the descriptions of the relationship between lord and freemen is less specific and indicative, perhaps, of the complexities that the compilers were presented with in parts of East Anglia. In Wickhampton "over all who used to resort to the fold of the Earl he had sake and soke", 'all' perhaps indicating that the numbers involved were not known or in dispute. In Reedham the Abbot of St Benet "used to have soke over those who followed the fold", and the soke of the remainder lay with the hundred. Again numbers are not specified but this is an example of a division that was common in East Anglia whereby the freemen of a lord rendered their soke to the hundred court – that is the king or the earl; and that those who attend the hundred court and were not bound to the lord's fold are foldworthy.⁴⁹

2.3 Freemen, Sokemen and Alienation

Freemen and sokemen were, in some circumstances, able to give or sell (alienate) their land, though by the eleventh century, this was unlikely to have occurred in practice.⁵⁰ Roffe, however, thinks otherwise, writing that the majority of freemen and sokemen "seemed to have had freedom of alienation...without the permission of their lord".⁵¹ Within the Domesday entries for Norfolk and Suffolk there are a number of references to alienation which suggest that the situation varied depending on lordly control, individual status and location. Thus, on the Bury holdings there was a significant difference between manorial and non-manorial holdings. On the latter all of the freemen could give and sell their land; on the former at Risby, Ingham, Stanton and Rickinghall Inferior the sokemen could not do so, whilst a small number of freemen (eleven) were able to alienate their land. The fact that those able to alienate their land are identified

⁴⁸ Maitland, 76

⁴⁹ Maitland, 90,91

⁵⁰ Williamson, Origins, 117; Hadley, 170

⁵¹ Roffe, Inquest 31

implies that the right to alienate was, more generally, non-existent or had been extinguished.

There are fewer examples from Norfolk, perhaps because change was not being driven by a monastic estate; at Tibenham and Fritton the right to sell was circumscribed - the lord having first refusal – but not in effect forbidden. Whether in practice the two are really so different is questionable – first refusal is still limited the free man's freedom of action. The third example from Norfolk was at Hudeston where the free men could sell their land but “the dues remained in the manor”: a further example of the association of customary dues with the land, and that the lord's rights over the land remained with him.⁵²

2.4 The Geography of the Domesday Fold Entries

The spatial distribution of the Domesday references to fold can be examined in several ways. Firstly, one can compare the distribution with that of the population of free men and sokemen. The two categories of status have been mapped for Norfolk using the parish map of the county overlaid with the population densities of free men and sokemen as plotted on a 4 x 4 km grid.⁵³ The distribution of freemen (Fig 3.1) and sokemen (Fig 3.2) were mapped separately as there are a number of significant differences: sokemen being fairly evenly distributed across the whole county whereas the free men were concentrated in a number of areas, principally in the north east, south east and south west.⁵⁴ It has been suggested that this difference in Norfolk may be due to greater economic freedom and an ability of the freemen in the east of the county to maintain or improve their status when compared to the west of the county with its stronger manorial control.⁵⁵

The distribution of Domesday fold entries shows a much better visual match with the freemen population densities than with that of sokemen. Whilst putting numbers to the degree of correlation has its risks (the dots representing Domesday entries are arbitrarily

⁵² Maitland 73

⁵³ Skipper, Williamson, 41

⁵⁴ Williamson, Origins, 119

⁵⁵ Skipper & Williamson, 41

placed within the correct parish whilst populations are mapped as a spatial grid not by vill or parish), the number of foldsoke locations that can reasonably be claimed to correlate with a grid square showing 30% or more of free men in the population is 25 out of 40 (62%). The same correlation for sokemen is ten (25%). The only locations which show no degree of correlation with the distribution of freemen are Hoe and Gateley, which are isolated at the centre of the map. Everywhere else displays some degree of correlation but, given the numbers of free men and sokemen in the county, this is to some degree inevitable. The combination of the concentrations of free men, and many of the Domesday entries are predominantly in the south-east of the county – in an arc to the east of Wymondham, along the Waveney valley and the edge of Broadland; with a smaller grouping in the south-west.

The south-east cluster may perhaps be associated with the idea that these areas were, in the middle Saxon period, probably given over to grazing estates devoted to cattle farming away from the main arable areas. These ‘graziers’ owed few obligations to their lord, and in the late Saxon period, as cultivation expanded due the growth in population, claimed ownership of their lands as freemen.⁵⁶ How ‘remote’ these freemen were by 1066 given the population densities in the areas under discussion is questionable but that such freemen had few obligations is clear from the Domesday expression of their services as in commendation and foldsoke.⁵⁷ The fold as a jurisdictional right clearly existed before 1066. The predecessors of these free men were perhaps, based on the description above, acting as “managers” of the lords’ herds or flocks, and augmented with the animals of the tenants in the isolated grazing areas attached to the estate. Foldsoke was the duty of putting livestock in the lords’ flock in order to manure the arable lands and the free man’s interest would depend upon the nature of his role: if he was purely managing the herd and owned no arable, he had no “interest” in the benefit of the fold as an individual but a significant interest in assuring the ownership of his animals, as Roffe suggested.

⁵⁶ Williamson, *Origins*, 121

⁵⁷ Williamson, T., Skipper, K., ‘Late Saxon Population Densities’, in *An Historical Atlas of Norfolk* ed Wade Martins P, Norwich, 1994, 43

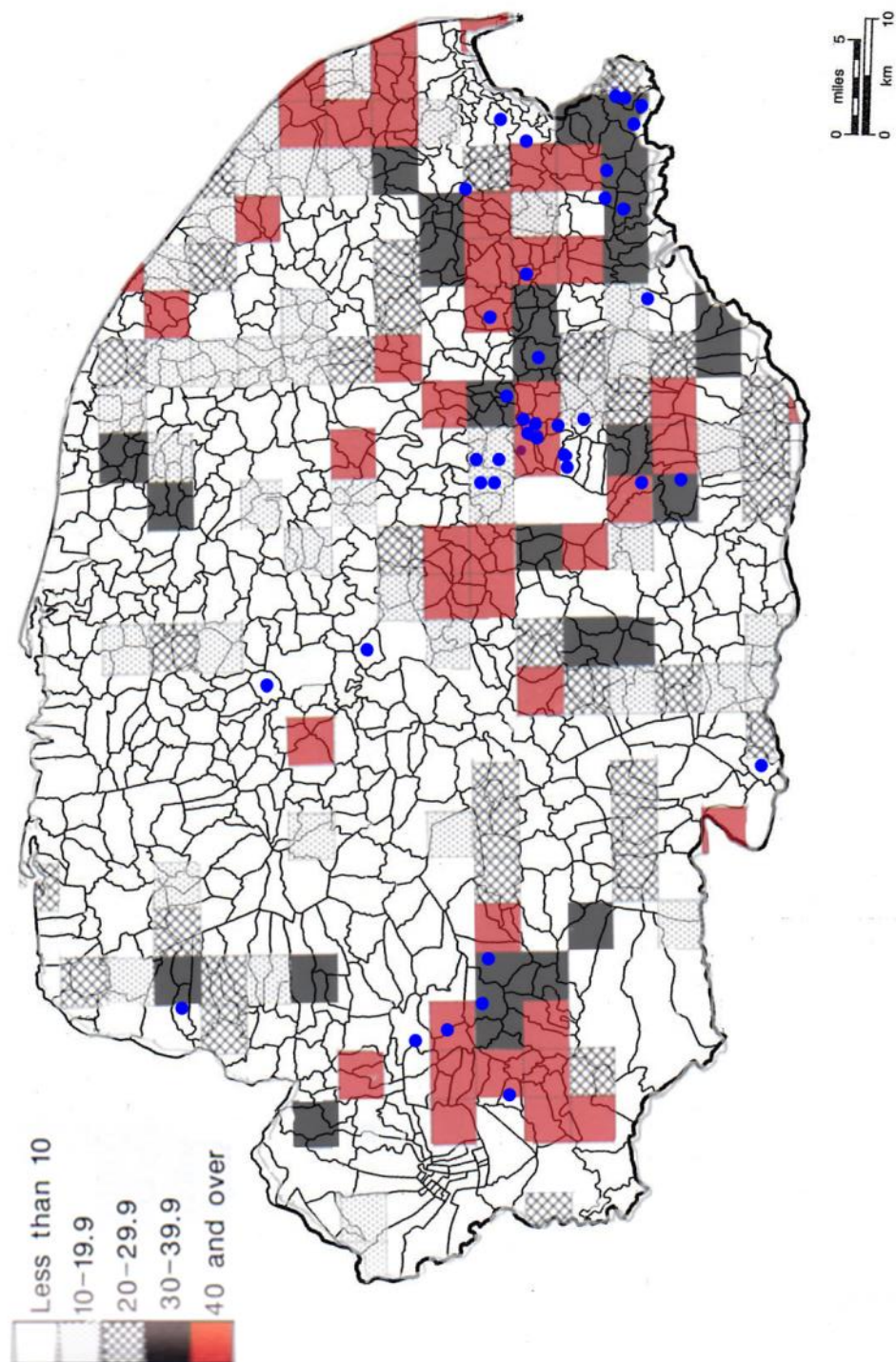
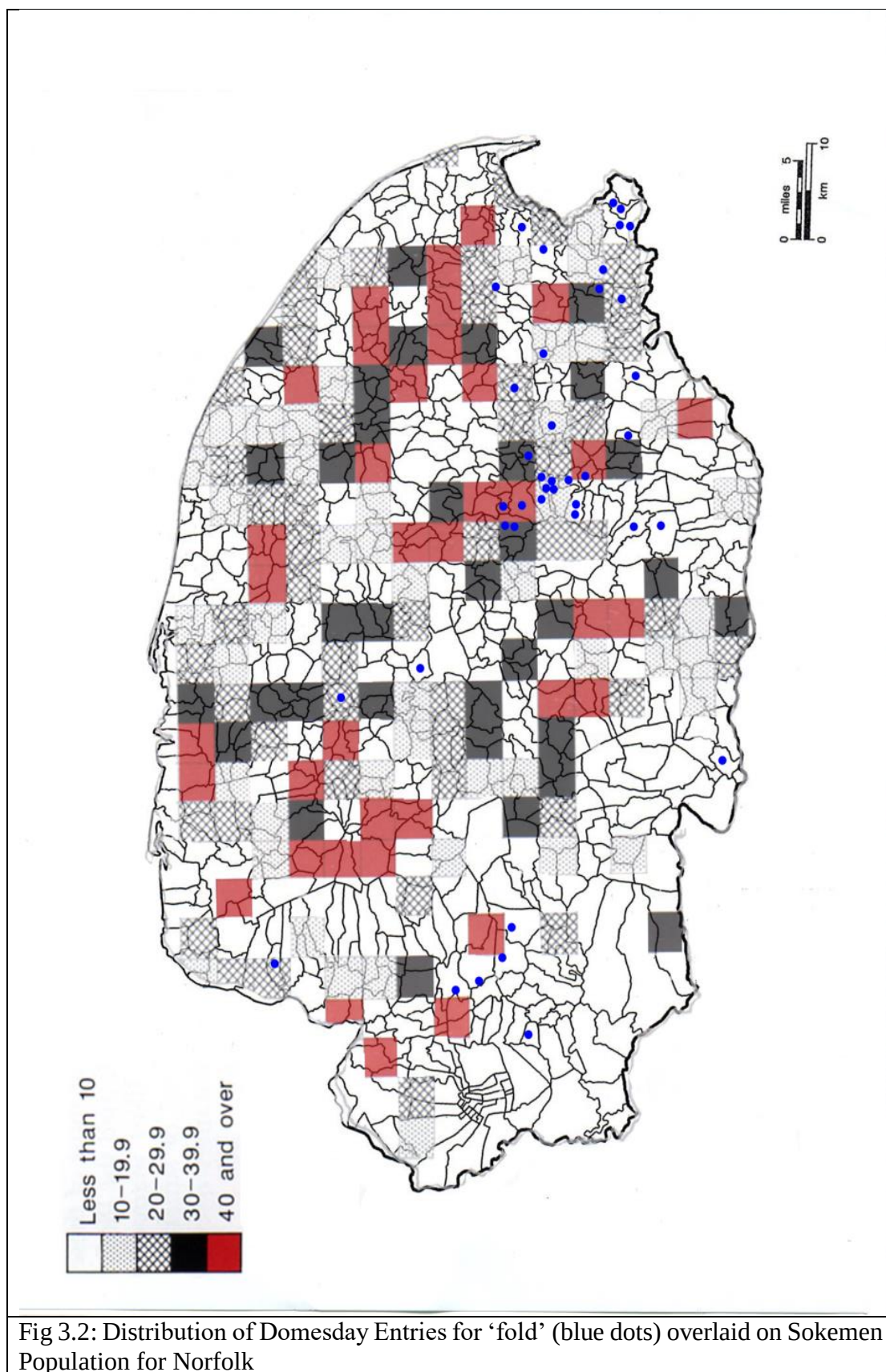


Fig 3.1: Distribution of Domesday Entries for 'fold' (blue dots) overlaid on Freeman Population for Norfolk



3. DISCUSSION

The relationships between lords and their freemen and sokemen in those villis where the term ‘fold’ is employed in the East Anglian Domesday entries are various, and the duties and degrees of freedom of both freemen and sokemen display some significant differences. It is clear that in the period between 1066 and 1086, many of the new Norman lords had removed or restricted some of the ‘freedoms’ of their tenants. The rights of St Edmunds over both the freemen and sokemen on its manors are carefully delineated and display a greater degree of control than those same groups on the non-manorial holdings of the Abbey. This reflects both the power of a major ecclesiastical lord over his estates and the enduring nature of the Church’s ownership, but also the influence of such an organisation in terms of its skills in documenting that estate. For the status and power of such estates – ecclesiastical and lay – is represented in their ability to bring their peasants into dependence.⁵⁸ The St Edmund’s estate thus represents what Hadley has characterised as “islands of a...manorialised peasantry” that were not typical of the region.⁵⁹ A region that as a whole is better represented by the remaining entries for both Norfolk and Suffolk which indicate a less circumscribed status characterised as commendation and foldsoke only. St Edmunds does however provide a signpost to a future in which as Maitland expressed it: “the customary tenant of the Domesday Book is the tenant who renders customs and the more customs he renders the more customary [i.e. un-free] he is”.⁶⁰

It is possible that foldsoke was a rare or unusual right that only occurred where mentioned but this seems unlikely given the critical nature of the fold to agrarian practices, particularly in light soil districts. Perhaps the fold and foldsoke was significant to the relationships between lords and tenants in these particular locations. Alternatively, and perhaps more likely, foldsoke was ubiquitous; it was common and occurred as a normal part of customary dues in most if not all manors and estates across East Anglia if not the whole of England. It’s very ubiquity meant that it was not worth mentioning; it was part and parcel of a range of customary dues that the tenants owed the lord. In those locations where it is specifically recorded, the reasons are perhaps twofold. In one case it is implicit in the phrase “in soke of the fold and commendation

⁵⁸ Hadley, 191, Faith, 122

⁵⁹ Hadley, 191

⁶⁰ Maitland, 78

(only)” – if soke of the fold was the only specific duty of the freemen that those compiling the record could document, other than the personal link of fealty, then it may have been recorded in order to demonstrate at least some degree of lordly control and was a tenorial wedge in the door.

Those who were not bound to the lord’s fold are described by Maitland as ‘foldworthy’; is it stretching the meaning to suggest that they were worth a fold of their own? Similarly, Douglas writing of eleventh-century East Anglia characterised “the possession of a private fold as one of the marks of freedom”.⁶¹ In the entries in Tables 3.1 and 2 there is only one clear example of this right – at Risby, where one sokeman of the Abbey of St Edmunds “had a fold for himself”. Bailey in his essay on Suffolk suggests that those tenants who were exempt from the seigneurial monopoly of the fold also had their own folds.⁶² One might therefore extend this to include those freemen who were in “commendation only”. If this assumption is correct and all who could do so, did establish their own folds, there would be, in the St Edmund’s manors, two folds in Fornham St Martin, three each in Risby and Rickinghall Inferior, four in Great Barton, and eight in Stanton. In the Abbey’s other holdings there would be multiple folds in Hessett, Rushbrooke and Stowlangtoft. In Norfolk the number whose service was restricted to “commendation only” was nine in Keswick, three at Hales, one in East Carleton, twelve in Fincham, three in West Briggs, 8½ in Thorpland and one in Rushford, Suffolk. The degree to which these folds were individual rather than communal – a ‘freemen’s fold’ - is unknown but the latter would have had its advantages, as discussed in the next section. Bailey has suggested that Domesday provides conclusive evidence that the foldcourse was already established in the late eleventh century and that the example at Risby demonstrates that it was already subject to local variation though he later describes it, more cautiously, as an *embryonic* foldcourse.⁶³

The spatial distribution of the Domesday entries to the fold for Suffolk are concentrated on the estates of the Abbey of Bury St Edmunds and do display a distribution which is the same as the later foldcourse. However, those for Norfolk, other than in the south-

⁶¹ Douglas, D. C., Oxford Studies in Social and Legal History, IX, The Social Structure of Medieval East Anglia, Oxford, (1927), 78

⁶² Bailey M, *An Introduction to the Suffolk Domesday*, Alecto Digital Domesday

⁶³ *ibid*

west of the county, display little connection with the later foldcourse. The Domesday evidence relating to the fold is concentrated in East Anglia and, rather than being agrarian in nature, appears to reflect the issues of feudal relationships and the varying degrees of freedom of individuals. Thus the entries for the Abbey display a significant degree of manorial control over the tenants' flocks, alongside the presence, confirmed in one case and assumed in a number of others, of folds held by freemen.

This, however, raises the question of whether the tenant folds represent a breaking away from the manorial control, or attempts by manorial lords to impose, through foldsoke, a greater degree of control. The Domesday evidence for the existence of the foldcourse is predominantly in the exceptions to the lordly power of foldsoke that it records; and those exceptions form the core of the next section. The fact that there are exceptions, and that freemen are released from the requirement to put their sheep in the lord's flock, indicates that lordly control over the fold was well established prior to 1066.

4. FOLDING, FREE FOLDING AND AGRICULTURE IN THE MEDIEVAL PERIOD

4.1 Introduction

This section will concentrate on the post-Domesday history of folds and folding. I will focus on a number of aspects of liberty of fold and the rights that were attached to such a liberty; together with an examination the interaction of such liberties with regard to lords and tenants and the management of folds and the agrarian role of the latter. This is followed by an exploration of the folding arrangements in three locations (Holkham, Walsham-le-Willows and Saffron Walden) across the region.

4.2 Some Aspects of Liberty of Fold

Status

Before examining the property issues in greater detail it is worth exploring the question of the status of a tenant who might hold a franchise such as liberty of fold. A number of the examples below come from ecclesiastical charters and cartularies where the status of the grantors or tenants is rarely explicit. However, Hilton has described the witnesses to charters as being, of necessity, individuals of free status and Stenton suggested that the freeholder of a small estate “is...revealed...through his power of disposing of his land by charter”.⁶⁴ Bailey makes a similar connection suggesting that free folds in Breckland were predominantly, but not exclusively, held by freemen, whilst in Chippenham (Cambs) in the early fourteenth century some free tenants also had the right of free fold.⁶⁵

An individual's status could also be changed by the acquisition of property. Lewes Priory, in 1375, granted all their lands and tenements in Sherbourne to Robert Haake, including a right of sheepwalk (*faldi socam*). Furthermore, Haake held the lands and tenements in villeinage (*bondagio*) and was to pay 5s 1d each year plus one sheep. Other requirements would suggest his status was ambiguous; for he was to pay or collect a relief after the death of each tenant; to perform annually one suit at the court

⁶⁴ Hilton, R. H., *A Medieval Society*, London (1966). 129; Quoted in Williamson, J., *Norfolk: The Thirteenth Century*, 84

⁶⁵ Bailey, A *Marginal Economy*, 68; Spufford, M. *A Cambridgeshire Community*, Leicester, (1966), 20

of the manor; collect, raise and pay 12s 9¾d of annual rent from the other freeholders in Sharnebourne; perform suit of court for them to the King; and not to alienate the said sheepwalk. All of this would imply that he had become a freeman and in effect of the holder of a ‘manor’. His change of status is confirmed by an almost identical document of 1405 in which the same property “once held in villeinage” by Haake was granted to Robert Rust.⁶⁶

The following example from Walsham le Willows, in 1333, would indicate that, in practice, an individual’s status, particularly in relation to the manorial court, could shift with the acquisition of a freehold property. A customary tenant was amerced for having his sheep outside the lord’s fold; but he was “not now amerced because he is resident of a free tenement”; and the order to return his sheep to the lord’s fold “could not now be executed...because they will not be moved until the summer”.⁶⁷ A similar example of the connection between fold rights and tenancy, rather than individual status, comes from Linton (Cambs), where in 1323 the Crutched Friars were granted 52 acres with the right to fold 120 sheep on their own land. The right later fell into disuse but an attempt to revive it was opposed by the manorial lord on the grounds that the land was copyhold. However, in 1547, he revived it for his own use.⁶⁸

The foregoing are examples of what Dyer has characterised as the “controversy” concerning the intermixing of status (whether an individual is free or servile) and the tenures they held – free or customary.⁶⁹ Freeman could hold unfree land provided they fulfilled the “servile obligations”.⁷⁰ Hatcher goes further, suggesting that whilst freemen commonly held unfree land, “many were prepared to accept personal as well as tenurial servility” for more land.⁷¹ For customary tenants the reverse - free land - was attractive because of lighter rents and more rights, but Bailey suggests that they “were persistently prevented from holding” such land. The examples above would suggest

⁶⁶ Bullock, docs 106, 107

⁶⁷ Lock, R., ed, *The Court Rolls of Walsham-le-Willows 1303-1350*, Suffolk Record Society, XLI, (1998), 164

⁶⁸ Wright, A., ‘Linton’ in VCH Cambridgeshire, 6, ed. Wright, A. Oxford, (1978), 87, 92

⁶⁹ Dyer, *Making a Living*, 175

⁷⁰ Bailey, M., *The English Manor c.1200-c.1500*, Manchester, (2002), 26

⁷¹ Hatcher, J., ‘English Serfdom and Villeinage’ *Past and Present* 90, 270

that the situation was more fluid, and as the same author comments in East Anglia the “gradations between free and unfree could be small and obscure”.⁷²

Liberty of Fold

The OED provides an example of the use of the term ‘faldage’ from Cole’s English Dictionary of the seventeenth century: “faldage – the liberty of folding his tenant’s sheep”– “his” presumably being the lord’s. Spelman also equated liberty of fold (*libertas falde*) with a manorial right.⁷³ In the case of the manorial lord one can see that this ‘liberty’ is inherent in his position as lord of the manor but many of the records indicate that in the medieval period ‘liberties’ were held by tenants – particularly freeholders - as well as by lords. The OED provides a number of definitions of liberty that may help define the right. Thus liberty can be “unrestricted use of, or access to...chiefly in the phrase ‘to have liberty of’”, and in a legal sense “a privilege or exceptional right granted to a subject by the sovereign power; a franchise, privileges...rights enjoyed by prescription or by grant”.⁷⁴ Warren suggests that whilst liberty and franchise were commonly used interchangeably, he defines franchise as “to denote a privilege allowed to a subject of exercising a function which normally belonged to the Crown”, and that liberty is a group of several privileges.⁷⁵ Maitland similarly, writing in the context of the thirteenth century, defines liberties or franchises as “a portion of royal power in the hands of the subject”⁷⁶ However, at the level of the manor the villeins rights are under manorial control, not the royal courts.

Definitions aside, the real question is: what does the ‘liberty’ allow the possessor to do, or not be required to do? With regard to folding one may assume that the ‘default’ position of a customary tenant is that covered by the term faldage or *faldagium* – he is to put his sheep in the lord’s fold, and that fold goes wherever the lord or his bailiff wills on the demesne and, perhaps, on the tenants’ lands. Villein tenants were also liable to carry out services such as moving the fold, providing hurdles for the same and

⁷² Bailey, English Manor, 26

⁷³ Spelman, H., *Glossarium*, 210, 211

⁷⁴ OED on line

⁷⁵ Warren, W. L., *The Governance of Norman and Angevin England 1086-1272*, London 1987.

⁷⁶ Maitland, 43.

washing and shearing the lord's sheep.⁷⁷ The lord thus has within his power, should he choose to exercise it, the feeding of both the demesne and tenants' sheep on the common and the post-harvest stubble, and the folding of all of the sheep of the manor on the arable for the purposes of fertilizing the land. Alternatively, it would appear he could 'exchange' this right for a money payment.

A freeholder's 'liberty' could thus encompass either or both of the arable and pasture: he might pasture his sheep separately from the demesne flock and/or be able to put his flock in his own fold on his own arable. Alternatively, such liberty may, rather than allowing the freedom to operate separately, involve a release from having to make payments; for example, from *faldagium* as a tax, and thus allow an individual to put his sheep in the demesne fold gratis, and still gain the benefit on his arable. There are a number of elements contained within the concept of free fold or liberty of fold. Firstly, there is the tenurial status of the holder. Secondly there is the concept of the liberty as property in itself, its association with a property such as a messuage, whether it could be alienated, and whether payment was due to the lord for possession thereof. The third aspect is agrarian: whether the liberty included both arable and pasture; the relationship between the liberty and the size of the associated arable; and whether the fold was stinted. The following draws out some of these options but does of course include, in many cases, more than one such element.

Liberty as Property and Inheritance

Liberty in the modern sense would tend to be associated with an individual or group but the indications are that in many cases the liberty of a fold is both 'property', in the sense that it can be alienated or bought and sold and also attached to a property, such as a messuage with its lands.⁷⁸ For example a charter of c1270 for a toft with appurtenances and liberty of one fold in Fincham (Norfolk), similarly many of the fourteenth-century charters from Stanton describe a messuage, or part of one, with lands and a free fold.⁷⁹

⁷⁷ For example: Peckham, W. D., ed, *Thirteen Customals of the Sussex Manors of the Bishop of Chichester*, Sussex Record Society, XXXI, Cambridge, (1925), 18

⁷⁸ Bailey, *Marginal Economy*, 68

⁷⁹ NRO HARE 1061, 191X1; Dymond, D., ed, *The Charters of Stanton, Suffolk*, Suffolk Record Society, Woodbridge, (2009) docs 75, 102, 127

In some instances such rights were hereditary: “*et totam meam faldam jure hereditario*”.⁸⁰ Grants in heredit, that is the transfer of freehold property from one person to another, were by far the most common type of document in the Stanton collection.⁸¹ In 1338 a messuage was granted with 20 acres of arable and liberty of one fold.⁸² A grant at Heacham in 1332 specified that the grant “was to lapse if the grantee died without direct heirs”.⁸³ Folds could also be bought and sold - a charter of c. 1280 grants “a quarter part of his fold which he purchased”.⁸⁴

It is difficult to determine to what extent the possession of a liberty of fold involved payment to the manorial lord. Separating the property – messuage and land – from the liberty appears impossible. The attachment of a liberty of fold to the property must, however, have increased its value but to what degree was it reflected in the rent? The value of a free fold can be estimated from the cost avoided: at Walsham-le-Willows the going rate for a temporary fold was 6d per score and was for a fixed period only.⁸⁵ A number of documents from Creak Abbey Cartulary emphasise the fold as free: for example “a free right to set up a fold in *Crek*”.⁸⁶ The grantor was however almost certainly a manorial lord, the son of the “lord and patron of the abbey”.⁸⁷ Such ‘free’ examples should be seen, I think, as distinctly different from liberty of fold as it pertained to freeholders and tenants.

Leases

In the later thirteenth century the farming out of the demesne lands under leases grew with the reduction in direct farming.⁸⁸ On major estates such as Ely and Winchester such leases became an increasing source of revenue and this was probably true also of smaller estates. The earliest lease from Stanton that includes a liberty of fold is from

⁸⁰ Dodwell, B., ed *The Charters of Norwich Cathedral Priory II*, London, (1974), doc 81

⁸¹ Dymond, Stanton Charters, 4

⁸² *ibid*, docs 127

⁸³ Bullock, doc 20

⁸⁴ Dymond, Stanton Charters, doc 34

⁸⁵ Lock, R., Walsham le Willows, (1998), 164

⁸⁶ Bedingfeld, A. L., ed, *A Cartulary of Creak Abbey*, Norwich Record Society, XXXV, (1966), doc 9

⁸⁷ Bedingfeld, docs 5,8

⁸⁸ Miller, E. Hatcher, J. *Medieval England – Rural Society and Economic Change 1086-1348*, (Harlow), 1978, 59

1304 and is a lease for life (from son to father) for a capital messuage with 106 acres;⁸⁹ similarly, a lease, of 1424, for lands, tenements, pastures and rents including liberty of fold in the fields of Wridlyngton (Worlington) and Freckenham for seven years at an annual rent of 14 marks.⁹⁰ The use of leases, which were normally for a fixed period, represents a step towards greater degree of control over tenants and farming practice - a 1446 lease from Stanton specified that the lessee was to have the dung of the lessor's faldage on the said lands.⁹¹ In the case of fold rights the lord could, if he wished, take these back in hand at the expiration of the lease; whereas the longevity of such rights which were hereditary depended on family circumstances.

The Farming Aspects of Liberty of Fold

The two components of sheep-corn husbandry – that is, the arable and pasture - are sometimes referred to in the documents as a pair, as for example at Thornham and Hindringham (Norfolk), both mid-thirteenth century: “*totam meam faldam...in campus et pascuis*”, and “*cum libera falda et libera pastura*”; and in an extract from the Micklefields court roll of 1485 involving the surrender of “the liberty of a fold with the pasture pertaining to the same and 47 acres of arable”.⁹² At Langford a late thirteenth-century grant of arable with a liberty of foldage (*lib[er]ate falde*) specified that the latter lay in the northern part of the fields of Bukenham and common pasture in Holmfield.⁹³ More commonly it is a messuage and lands only that are referred to. The inclusion of arable and pasture, particularly in the later examples, may be because, as the editor of the Stanton charters comments, “of increasing verbosity... and the more frequent use of attorneys” over time.⁹⁴ However, a fold without access to pasture would hardly be viable and the owner of a free fold might simply place his sheep with the lord's flock for the purposes of pasturing., and this is perhaps most likely in those cases where pasturing is not specifically mentioned.

⁸⁹ Dymond, Stanton Charters, doc 75

⁹⁰ Callard, E., *The Manor of Freckenham*, London, (1924), 220

⁹¹ Dymond, Stanton Charters, doc 296

⁹² Dodwell, Norwich Cathedral Priory II, doc 81, 88; Dymond, Stanton Charters, doc 349

⁹³ NRO PTR 1/7, 756x4

⁹⁴ Dymond, Stanton Charters, 5

It is of note how variable in apparent size the acreage of arable land (when it is detailed in a charter) to which a fold is ‘attached’ could be. The Stanton charters provide a number of examples. At one extreme, from 1304, is a messuage with 106 acres of arable and liberty of fold; at the other is one rood lying in the field of Stanton and also with liberty of fold.⁹⁵ Other examples include Heacham where a holding of one acre included a ‘course’ for 360 sheep and no more in the fields; a messuage with 69½ acres of land in Sedgeford and Heacham “*cum libertate duorum faldagorium*” in 1275; and a messuage with 20½ acres and *libertatum unus falde* in Thornham in 1283.⁹⁶ It is, I would suggest, reasonable to assume that, for the larger examples, the match between the size of arable and the holder having a fold makes agricultural sense. In the case of one acre or one rood it is difficult to envisage how this might have worked, or even how a fold could have fitted on the land in question. One possible answer is that the holder of the franchise had other arable lands in the vicinity held of another manor – a not unreasonable suggestion given the manorial complexity common in some parts of East Anglia.⁹⁷ Another is that such small holdings were the result of the division of holdings or partible inheritance whilst the fold franchise has remained unitary; however folds could be divided, as at Stanton, c.1280, in a grant including a quarter part of [a] fold.⁹⁸ If, however, in the majority of examples the ‘liberty’ was to put one’s sheep into a communal fold, then the relationship between arable acreage and number of sheep is irrelevant.

There are a few examples of how liberty of fold and ‘ownership’ of the tathe were intertwined. At East Rudham an agreement of 1338, allowed William Knout to common in the heath (*bruery*) and in 20 acres of arable with 300 sheep and to tathe the 20 acres with his fold.⁹⁹ At Hockwold, during Henry VIII’s reign, it was ruled by The Court of Star Chamber that between tillage and sowing the freeholders having as much as 1 acre of land ‘tylled to sowe yt’ might lawfully ‘pynne and fold their shepe upon suche ther lands to tathe them’ provided they did not damage the corn of their neighbours.¹⁰⁰ This judgement contains some interesting hints as to the farming regime. Firstly, ‘as much

⁹⁵ *ibid*, doc 75, 157

⁹⁶ Bullock, doc 20; Dodwell, Norwich Cathedral Priory II, doc 36, 73

⁹⁷ Campbell, B. M S, ‘The Complexity of Manorial Structure in Medieval Norfolk: A Case Study’, *Norfolk Archaeology*, 34 (1986).

⁹⁸ Dymond, Stanton Charters, doc 34

⁹⁹ NRO BL/MD/6/10

¹⁰⁰ Oestmann, 115

as 1 acre' implies a highly sub-divided and dispersed layout. Secondly, the time allowed for the freeholders to fold their land would have followed the time of shack and ploughing, and provided a very narrow window for a winter sown crop, but an extended time for a spring sown crop – though folding in winter could be problematic.

Stinting, which limited the number of animals that could be pastured, was a common practice designed to prevent the overstocking of the pastures.¹⁰¹ At Shropham (Norfolk), in a manorial extent of the manor of Bradcar of 1298-99, the stint was in one case without limit and in another specified; thus John de Breckles and Richard de Snytterton held, respectively, 55 acres in Breckles Magna and 60 acres in Snytterton (Snetterton) with right of foldage without limit, and Bartholomew de Gardino who held, 60 acres in Hockham with “foldage for six score and 1 heads”. All three were freeholders of Bradcar manor.¹⁰² The Abbey of Bury St Edmunds was also, apparently, diligent in specifying a stint – thus at Rougham (Suffolk) in the second quarter of the twelfth century reference is made to a fold for 28 sheep; similarly, in Great Barton (Suffolk), c.1150, a *hereditarie tenendum* includes a fold for 360 sheep.¹⁰³ However, in the 22 Stanton charters which document a fold or liberty of fold, stinting receives no mention.

A more detailed description of pasture rights appears in a Lewes charters, dated 1373. The entry included a messuage with just under fourteen acres of land in *Hecham* and *Holm by Ryngstede*, a free sheepfold and a “run for 300 sheep to be set up wherever...[the recipient]...shall think fit, in all roads, droveways, footpaths, commons, marshes, grazing grounds, pastures” – a comprehensive list of grazing opportunities but also an indication of the connection between run (or course) and grazing rather than arable at this period.¹⁰⁴ Another Lewes charter, of 1332, includes a rare example of the use of the term foldcourse (*cursus unius falde*). This is transcribed by the editor as ‘sheep run’, but the literal translation is one course of fold. It was attached to one acre of land and the ‘course’ was for 360 sheep and no more in the fields of Heacham, the grant also reserves to the Priory, throughout the whole year, their own

¹⁰¹ Bailey, *Marginal Economy*, 70

¹⁰² Hudson, 24, 7

¹⁰³ Douglas, D. C., ed, *Feudal Documents from the Abbey of Bury St Edmunds*, London, (1932), 118, 133

¹⁰⁴ Bullock, doc 22

rights of pasture.¹⁰⁵ “Course” in the context of the fields of Heacham presumably refers to a stint on the post-harvest shack and fallow shift, but it is reasonable to assume that rights of pasture on common or heath are also included, given the Priory reservation with regard to annual pasture rights.

4.3 Local Folding Arrangements

Holkham

The previous section has provided an overview of the range of rights and liberties associated with the fold. This section examines those same rights in three specific contexts across East Anglia. The first is Holkham on the north Norfolk coast where, in 1306 an inquiry was made into the sheep folds in the township, an inquiry that demonstrates how widespread individual folds could be in a single location at this time. There were 20 folds in the township of three types: nine were *faldae communes* (common folds); five *juxta mariscum saleficium* (next to the salt marsh) and six ‘cotesfoldes’ (temporary folds¹⁰⁶). Their ownership is summarised in table 3.3. The folds were held by both manorial lords and freeholders; thus of the nine common folds, three were held by monastic foundations, Hugh de Veer was lord of Burghall manor and le Bret of Bret manor. Three – those of Goldewyn, Ayneld and Godwyne - were held by freemen and whilst the status of John Hammond is unclear, he was holding the fold by demise (will or lease¹⁰⁷), as was John Ayneld. Of the saltmarsh folds three were manorial whilst the other two were held by freemen.¹⁰⁸ The saltmarsh folds were clearly designed to take advantage of the feed from the marsh - probably in the summer only – the sheep could then feed or fold the open field that lay immediately south of the marshes. Cotesfoldes were distinguished from the others in two ways. They were restricted to the summer and autumn, functioning between the 25th July and 11th November and they were also restricted spatially, unlike the common folds.¹⁰⁹ Utilising Hassall and Beauroy’s map of Holkham and topographical appendix, it is possible to locate the approximate areas of each of the cotesfoldes.¹¹⁰ All six were in the west of

¹⁰⁵ Bullock, doc 20

¹⁰⁶ Hassall, Beauroy, 52

¹⁰⁷ OED online

¹⁰⁸ Hassall, Beauroy, 31, 32, 36

¹⁰⁹ *ibid*, 37

¹¹⁰ *ibid*, 535, 543-579

the township and did not include the lyngs or heath to the east. The boundaries of the cotesfoldes of Peterstone and Bartholomew Adam in Southfield are clearly delineated, as is that of Bertram le Verdoun in Westfield. The remaining three are concentrated in the northern part of Southfield and Westfield and apparently overlap – however, I am sure that those on the ground knew where the boundaries lay.

Table 3.3: Folds in Holkham, 1306¹¹¹

Common Folds	Folds next to Saltmarsh	Cotesfoldes
Hugh de Veer	Hugh de Veer	Prior of Peterstone & Humphrey David
Abbot of Crek	Prior of Walsingham	Bartholomew de Burgate
Prior of Walsingham	Abbot of Dereham	Humphrey David & Eborardi Caly
Prior of Peterstone	Richard le Northerne	Bartholomew Adam
John le Bret	William Silk	Geoffrey Poysun
Martin Goldewyn		Bertrammus le Verdoun
John Ayneld		
John Hammond		
John Godwyne		

Bold = Manorial holding

Walsham-le-Willows

Walsham-le-Willows lies about ten miles north-east of Bury St Edmunds on the Suffolk claylands. The fourteenth-century court rolls of the manors of Walsham and High Hall in Walsham-le-Willows provide further evidence of both the widespread employment of the fold in the Middle Ages and more importantly, the involvement of the tenants as holders of folds. These folds were temporary, all were held of Walsham manor and the fine paid for a fold was 6d per score of sheep.¹¹²

Over the period 1331 to 1350 no less than 22 tenants had, at various times, a fold. Of these, four were for just a single year, and on a number of occasions two tenants shared a fold – though only for a single year. Three tenants William Hawys, William of Cranmer and Robert Rampolye, had a fold for the majority of the time in question.

¹¹¹ *ibid*, 37 (full text on 111)

¹¹² Lock, (1998), 164

Hawys and Cranmer both ran flocks of 100 to 160 head, the number varying yearly. Included in those numbers are the free folds that both also held. The documents record for Hawys that “1 score he has free”; and for Cranmer that he “has 20a to which one fold belongs and holds 40 sheep free”. Walter Osbern also held a free fold for “2 score he has free” but is only recorded as renting a temporary fold in 1334.¹¹³

Other than Hawys, Cranmer, Rampolye and Goche, the remaining tenants appear to have dipped in and out of renting a fold (Table 3.4). There is clearly a pattern for those who regularly had a temporary fold, thus in 1337 no one had one (there were, however, courts held that year) and only one person in 1332 and 1342. Given these gaps the decisions cannot have been individualistic – perhaps weather, murrain or commodity prices caused the tenants to withdraw. After 1348, not surprisingly, the number of temporary folds fell sharply with one mentioned in 1350 and then none until 1359, when there were five, followed by two in 1361.¹¹⁴

Table 3.4: Fines for Folds (indicated by X) by Tenant and Year (1332 – 1348)

TENANTS	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40	41	42	43	44	45	46	47	48
Hawys		X	X		X		X		X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X
Cranmer		X	X		X		X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X
Rampolye					X		X	X	X	X			X	X	X	X	X
Goche		X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X							
Herring										X		X	X			X	X
Terwald													X	X	X	X	X
Jay		X	X	X	X		X										
Clevehog	X				X		X				X						
Springold			X	X													
Baxter															X	X	X
Sare		X	X														
Osbern			X														
Lene													X	X			
Saxmundam		X															
Badwell		X															
Warde		X															

¹¹³ *ibid*, 160, 164, 167

¹¹⁴ *ibid* 335; Lock, R., ed *The Court Rolls of Walsham le Willows 1351-1399*, Suffolk Record Society XLV, Woodbridge, (2002), 52, 55, 61

Temporary folds were in effect a temporary alienation of the lord's rights. He gave permission and money changed hands. But such arrangements were short term – the lord able to terminate the arrangement each time payment was due. The temporary folds were, as at Holkham, for a fixed period. Where a date is mentioned they all ceased at Michaelmas or ran “until Michaelmas and no more”. Some were for the farming year. Thus one ran from a court on 27th September 1335 “until Michaelmas one year hence”, others are from courts that met in January or July.¹¹⁵ There are only two start dates given, 3rd May and 2nd February, which would suggest that these folds mostly extended over the summer until the start of the next farming year. This is supported by other entries: Henry de Wells paid 12d to graze his sheep on the common in the fold of another until next Michaelmas; and more ambiguously “Adam Skert...should graze in the open season with the fold which he has...as far as Rahawe, Kolnhawe and Waryneshawe”.¹¹⁶ This is not the only example where the extent of the grazing right is defined.

The ‘open season’ was presumably the period of spring and summer and the tenants were paying for the right to graze their sheep on the common, which if correct meant that they were excluded from a common right to do so. The field book of 1577 supports this – the customs of Walsham and Walsham Church House specify that the tenants had feed for their “cattell and cowthings” on the common of Hallowd Green.¹¹⁷ At Michaelmas all these small flocks were gathered into one flock for folding. Indeed there are a number of references to tenants being amerced for having sheep outside the lord's fold.¹¹⁸ The great majority of these references are from courts held in the autumn or winter indicating that the requirement was well policed and in 1332 Osbern was amerced 3d for having 120 sheep from Michaelmas “until this day” – 2nd December.¹¹⁹

However, in 1351 there is reference to the common fold (*communis falda*) not having been raised the previous year.¹²⁰ This implies that rather than going into the manorial fold, the small flocks were separately gathered into this common fold. Given the date

¹¹⁵ Lock (1998), 189

¹¹⁶ Ibid, 157, 163

¹¹⁷ Dodd, K. M., ed *The Field Book of Walsham le Willows*, Suffolk Record Society, XVII, (1974), 49

¹¹⁸ e, g. Lock (1998), 103, 104

¹¹⁹ Lock (1998), 154

¹²⁰ Lock (2002), 29

and the chaos that must have followed the Black Death, one can understand such activity going by the board if the common fold had been the practice prior to 1348; and that the frequent references to the lord's fold were thus to the common fold which the lord had on his land. The less likely alternative is that the common fold was an innovation in response to the loss of life and labour to manage the sheep. That the tathe was the lord's is made clear in several entries: in 1383 the lord's shepherd was amerced for manuring 3 roods of a tenant's land with the lord's fold without permission and in 1399, "the lord's shepherd and keeper of the cullet" (the common flock?) [was misled] ... "and the lord lost the dunging of eight acres worth 2s per acre".¹²¹ There are two exceptions, both in 1329, where tenants could fold separately: Hilary Cook paid "12d for leave for 60 sheep to lie in the fold on her own land" and William Clevehog paid the same also for 60 sheep folding his own land "until Michaelmas".¹²² Clevehog was a freeman but the status of Cook, who was a widow, is unclear.¹²³

Fold rights were also the subject of a number of disputes. In 1328 there were arguments concerning the number of sheep being grazed by the Prior of Ixworth in Walsham, and – on a separate occasion – over the use by his flock of an area of pasture where he had no right of common. The same entry refers to a court of 1313 which had established where the Prior's sheep could graze.¹²⁴ In 1329, the Priory purchased three liberty of folds, all of which included limits as to where the sheep might feed. It was also reported (in 1332) that the Prior had acquired another liberty of fold.¹²⁵ The enquiries as to the Prior's depredations with regard to overstocking, moving boundaries, and feeding in the wrong places in the township continued.¹²⁶ In 1366 the Prior was again challenged as to his rights and it was recorded that "he showed four charters...by which his predecessors had been enfeoffed of the right to raise folds, with rights of common to graze with sheep in the aforesaid common land, and to drove them there and back again".¹²⁷ His assertions, were, however denied as regards to the common rights – a further indication of the manorial hold over those rights as they applied to sheep. The Prior of Ixworth was not alone, Sir Alexander de Walsham "unlawfully raised [a fold]

¹²¹ Ibid, 141, 159

¹²² Lock (1998), 121, 125

¹²³ *ibid*, 309

¹²⁴ *ibid*, 106, 114

¹²⁵ *ibid*, 121, 154

¹²⁶ *ibid*, 161, 213, 142, 151

¹²⁷ Lock (2002), 83

on free land where he had no liberty of fold nor right to common his sheep”. This was subsequently condoned by the lord, but “the whole homage was in mercy for concealing the same”.¹²⁸ The disputes discussed above clearly indicate that the actions of flockmasters and others in the sixteenth century were nothing new although it is noteworthy that in the last case the tenants still got the rap.

Saffron Walden

Saffron Walden lies in north-west Essex in the Cam valley and was a large parish of some 7,500 acres.¹²⁹ The soils were of several distinct types – principally the calcareous loamy soils of the Swaffham Prior association (511e) on the lower valley slopes, giving way to the less permeable clay and chalky Hanslope soils (411d) on the higher ground to the east.¹³⁰ Walden was thus an example of a township that lay on the borders of two agrarian regimes. One was sheep-corn husbandry on the lower valley soils. The second, on the higher ground, had a number of features in common with the Chiltern settlements to the west, including a pattern of dispersed settlements and hamlets with their own field systems which had been established by 1400 and included seven sub manors.¹³¹ Saffron Walden was thus distinctly different to both to the pattern of nucleated settlement and large open fields in neighbouring south Cambridgeshire, and the polyfocal settlements and more loosely organised open fields of western East Anglia.

The two main settlements lay in the river valley, as did the two manors: The Abbey of Walden and the lay manor of Chepyng Walden.¹³² Cromarty was able to reconstruct the boundaries of the three folds in Walden.¹³³ Both manors held lands in the three folds. The infold lay over the fields close to the Abbey, whilst the lay manor’s lands were predominantly in the much more extensive outfold which included some lower-lying arable and all of the higher ground. The third fold – Bolisgove - lay in the north of the parish. Altogether there were 655 acres within the three folds; the Abbey having within the infold 297½ acres predominantly open field, which “was therefore able to carry 892

¹²⁸ Lock (1998), 108

¹²⁹ Cromarty, D., *The Fields of Saffron Walden in 1400*, Chelmsford, (1966), 4

¹³⁰ Soil Survey of England and Wales Map, Sheet 4, Eastern England, 1: 250,000, Harpenden

¹³¹ Roden, D., ‘Field Systems of the Chiltern Hills and their Environs’ in Baker, A. Butlin, R., *Field Systems in the British Isles*, Cambridge, (1973), 339; Cromarty, 10, 11, 5, map 3

¹³² Cromarty, 10, 11, 5, map 3

¹³³ Cromarty, map 3

monastic sheep at the customary stint of three per acre”.¹³⁴ This figure of three per acre comes from an agreement of 1385 at the court of Waldenbury which laid down the stint of sheep for individual holdings.¹³⁵ The Abbey manor appears to have restricted the faldage rights to the Abbot’s flocks and that the “direct tenants” were not able to keep sheep – a restriction that would not presumably have applied to freeholders. However, the tenants of the lay manors, whatever their status, did keep sheep – the smallholders having six or twelve whilst those with multiple tenancies could have 100 and more.¹³⁶

The township had a ‘conventional’ three-part crop rotation of winter sown, spring sown and fallow in 1400; but at this date, whilst there was “an abundance of field names” the agrarian regime was organised by *quarentena* and the distribution of holdings was scattered.¹³⁷ Whilst the crop regime may have been three part, it was not perhaps a three-year cycle. Hugh Botere a free tenant of the abbey in 1400 held 46¾ acres, which lay, in 29 separate parcels, on the calcareous soils along the valley, predominantly in the Abbey’s infold with some in the valley lands encompassed by the outfold.¹³⁸ His arable was divided into: 10 acres winter sown; 10¾ acres spring sown; and 26 acres fallow.¹³⁹ Having 56% of his land in fallow would suggest that some of it at least was fallow for more than one year.

It is difficult not to see the naming of the folds as infold and outfold as a reflection of infield-outfield agriculture, of which Botere’s cropping pattern might be a further reflection. However, Cromarty suggests that the infold was originally for ewes and lambs, and the latter for wethers given that it was previously called ‘le wederherd’.¹⁴⁰ The boundary of the outfold encompassed much more land than was in the infold and only a small portion of the former, primarily in the south west corner, was being cultivated in 1400.¹⁴¹ It also included a significant proportion of the wood pasture zone; and, the land in the eastern part of the parish which was cleared later was not subdivided into small strips, nor was it always open to common folding.¹⁴²

¹³⁴ Cromarty, 14

¹³⁵ Cromarty, 13

¹³⁶ Cromarty, 15

¹³⁷ Cromarty, 6, 9

¹³⁸ Cromarty, 9, maps 3, 4

¹³⁹ Cromarty, 10

¹⁴⁰ Cromarty, 14

¹⁴¹ Cromarty, map 3

¹⁴² Cromarty, 10, 11

5. DISCUSSION

One should not become too precious or precise about some of the definitions discussed, particularly at later dates, given that meanings undoubtedly shifted over time - as *faldagium* appears to have done in the sixteenth century, to judge a reference from Risby to “one free fold right (*faldagium*) or liberty of fold pertaining to the said tenement”.¹⁴³ Similarly, the OED has an early eighteenth-century quotation describing how “this faldage in some places is termed Fold-course or free-fold”.¹⁴⁴ In addition, it is unclear how far acquisitions, and above all time lie behind entries such as the following from Haverhill in 1725: “free liberty of sheepwalk sheepcourse and sheepgate foldage and foldcourse” is perhaps a lawyer covering all the angles.¹⁴⁵

In the Middle Ages the possession of folds and fold rights was not confined to the manorial lords. There are many references to liberty of fold or free fold, held principally by freemen, which co-existed with the manorial right of foldcourse or foldsoke. The principal element of the ‘liberty’ was the freedom from having to pay a fine to put the holder’s sheep in the manorial flock; although there are examples where the liberty included the right to tathe one’s own lands. Free fold was frequently part of a property and in some cases the acquisition of such property effected a change to the status of the new holder. In addition, many other tenants – both freeholders and customary – were able to keep sheep in temporary folds for which they paid a fine to the manorial lord. Manorial lords thus allowed, perhaps encouraged, tenants to keep sheep and the fines that such sheep generated contributed to manorial income; and more importantly those sheep – kept in the lord’s fold - were a contribution to the fertility of the arable.

It is clear that the contribution of the tenants’ sheep to the fold played a significant role in the maintenance of soil fertility in the Middle Ages. What is much more opaque is the degree of ‘commonality’ in the management of the flocks and folds. At Walsham-le-Willows it is not clear if there were one or two flocks. In Saffron Walden, the abbey flock was restricted to demesne animals but the second manor’s flock was open to all tenants. At Holkham, there were folds called *faldae communes*, but five of the nine were manorial as were three of the five next to the saltmarsh. This does not sound very

¹⁴³ SROB 449/2/578

¹⁴⁴ OED online – faldage, quote from *Terres de la ley*, 1708

¹⁴⁵ ERO D/DGd T31

“communal”. Communal folds were, however, widely employed in medieval Breckland, and, where there were large numbers of tenants’ sheep, the flocks were separate, although at Culford the tenants’ sheep were in the lord’s fold.¹⁴⁶ Overall, these flocks are not, I suggest, operating in the same sense of ‘common’ as employed by Kerridge with regard to the Wiltshire downs or by Gray in his description of the Midland system, where pasturage was inhered in the whole township.¹⁴⁷ Manorial lords were clearly involved and the fact that the appointment of the shepherds “was a seignorial responsibility” is significant.¹⁴⁸

There is only limited evidence for the holders of free folds operating in an individualistic fashion folding their own arable with their own flock. In fact, such activity raises again the problem of how the manorial flock could be confined to the demesne arable – albeit on a much smaller scale. Given the importance of the fold in maintaining soil fertility, it was perhaps to the lord’s overall benefit to widen the ownership of sheep in order to maintain and improve the soil and maximise rental income for the arable by including fold rights or, as at Stanton above, to provide the lessee with a source of manure.

It is clear that the medieval foldcourse involved both lord and tenants as owners of sheep, and that the numbers of sheep held by the latter was significant; whilst in some townships separate tenant flocks existed. The foldcourse of, say 1350, was thus a very different beast from the ‘classic’ foldcourse outlined in Chapter 1. The sixteenth-century foldcourse was a mirror image of what had preceded it with the lord’s sheep dominating the fold.

Finally, there is the question as to whether the ‘classic’ foldcourse was, rather than being an evolution of the earlier more diverse model set out above, an innovation in the sense that there were clearly examples where manorial lords claimed “foldcourse rights” without any legal justification. Nathaniel Bacon was called upon, in 1582, to adjudicate in a case at Marsham, where the farmer of the Queen’s estate was accused, amongst other offences, of erecting “a foldecoursse where he oughte not”. Bacon’s

¹⁴⁶ Bailey, *Marginal Economy*, 76

¹⁴⁷ Kerridge, *Common Fields*, 74; Gray, H., *English Field Systems*, London, (1959), 326

¹⁴⁸ Bailey, *Marginal Economy*, 76; NRO LEST P/20,98

opinion was that the farmer was “keapinge 300 *dimidia* of shepe whereas none ought to be kepte or not so many” and that the tenants had just cause for complaint.¹⁴⁹ A foldcourse at nearby Cawston was also the subject of dispute in the sixteenth century and Whyte has suggested that the owner attempted “to present the foldcourse arrangements as an ancient institution”, with detailed descriptions of boundaries and access rights.¹⁵⁰ This does not, however, mean that, across the region as a whole, the foldcourse was something new; although by the sixteenth century it was evolving into an institution very different to that which had existed in the thirteenth or fourteenth centuries. Whilst the foldcourse was a cause of dispute – particularly in Norfolk – the disputes appear to be primarily about the changes (such as lords overstocking the flock) of a pre-existing institution. In those examples where the right to a foldcourse was claimed, the demand was resisted or rejected on the basis that a pre-existing right did not exist – as at Cawston and Marsham. This further suggests that those making the judgements knew full well what constituted a foldcourse right, and at Marsham one would assume that Nathaniel Bacon, as a lawyer and foldcourse owner, would be pre-disposed to support a legitimate foldcourse claim.

¹⁴⁹ Hassell Smith *et al*, Bacon Papers, II, 243, 244.

¹⁵⁰ Whyte, Perceptions of the Norfolk Landscape, 256

CHAPTER 4: THE CONTEXT OF THE FOLDCOURSE IN EAST ANGLIA

1. INTRODUCTION

The history of the foldcourse is interwoven with the environment within which it evolved. This chapter will examine the overall regional contexts that underlie that evolution: the manorial structures; patterns of settlement; field systems and pastures; and the possible interactions between these and the foldcourse. Discussion of Cambridgeshire, given the differences to other parts of East Anglia appears separately towards the end of the chapter. Overall, in attempting to define and discuss patterns of settlement and field systems in relation to the foldcourse one must avoid being too didactic – such zones and their boundaries are by their very nature ‘fuzzy’, particularly in a region whose landscape has been described as patchy, with a “lack of uniformity” as its essential characteristic.¹

2. TENURIAL STRUCTURES

The social and tenurial structures of Norfolk and Suffolk in the late eleventh century were “particularly complex”.² In the previous chapter I examined the evidence from Domesday Book with regard to the tenurial status and large numbers of freemen and sokemen in Norfolk and Suffolk, two counties where the ‘traditional’ arrangement of a vill containing a single manor and a population primarily made up of villeins and bordars, was a rare occurrence.³ This section will focus on the manors and their role in the development of the foldcourse, which was itself a manorial institution.

2.1 The Manors

The complexity of manorial organisation in Norfolk during the Medieval period has been described as “difficult to exaggerate”, whilst Hadley comments that one of the features of the wider Danelaw was “its complex estate structure” and “fragmented tenurial arrangements”.⁴ Douglas summarised the rights of lordship in East Anglia as “miscellaneous and loosely

¹ Williamson, *Shaping Medieval Landscapes*, 138; Roberts, *Wrathnell, Region and Place*, 160

² Williamson, *Origins*, 162

³ Skipper, Williamson, *Late Saxon Social Structure*, 40

⁴ Williamson, *Origins*, 164; Hadley, 24, 189

organised”, with manor and vill having no coincidence; each vill typically having four or five manors and those manors often having lands in several vills.⁵ This lack of coincidence between manor and vill was not confined to East Anglia. For “the ‘typical’ coincidence of manor and vill is... not typical at all” even in the Midlands.⁶ Stenton characterises the region as, in 1066, an “un-manorialised country”, albeit one moving towards greater lordly authority. He also described most of the pre-conquest manors of eastern England as a whole as consisting of a central estate to which “light rents and occasional services were rendered” by large numbers of virtually independent tenants (as enumerated in Chapter 3) that were dispersed over a wide area.⁷ Manors of this type, with their loose overall control and often scattered holdings, are perhaps better viewed, not as demesne and tenantry owing extensive services, but as “administrative units created for the exploitation of the land”.⁸

2.2 *Nomina Villarum*

The nature of manorial organisation continued to evolve after Domesday Book and the next document that provides an overview thereof is the *Nomina Villarum*. This was compiled in 1316 following the demand of Edward II that the sheriffs in each county draw up a list of the names of the lords of each city, borough and township. It provided the first country-wide overview of the manorial structure since the compilation of the Domesday survey. In Norfolk 695 townships were identified, the great majority of which had two or more lords, with only 163 being held by a single lord.⁹ This latter group was primarily in the west of the county. *Nomina Villarum* is not without its drawbacks, and a number of authors have pointed out its unreliability as an indication of the manorial complexity of East Anglia.¹⁰ Campbell produced, for Norfolk, a distribution map combining the data from *Nomina Villarum* with that from the lay subsidy of 1334 and, based on the size, value and number of manors, demonstrated that the manors in the hundreds to the north-west and south-east of the county were large, high in value and few in number as opposed to those in the centre and north east which are small, of low value and numerous.¹¹ Bailey, in a similar fashion, but mainly using the work of the antiquarian

⁵ Douglas, 3

⁶ Kosminsky, 73, 74, 69

⁷ Stenton, F. M., *Anglo Saxon England*, Oxford, (1971), 491, 481

⁸ Birtles, S., ‘*A Green Space Beyond Self Interest: The Evolution of Common Land in Norfolk c 750 – 2003*’, unpublished PhD. University of East Anglia, (2003), 33

⁹ Blake, W. J., ‘Norfolk Manorial Lords in 1316’, *Norfolk Archaeology* 30, (1952), 235, 236

¹⁰ Bailey, *Medieval Suffolk*, 28; Hassall, *Beauroy*, 26; Campbell, *Manorial Structure*, 232

¹¹ Campbell, *Manorial Structure*, 228

Copinger, has mapped the distribution of manors in Suffolk, demonstrating a similar division, with manorial fragmentation c. 1300 higher in the east of the county - with over 3.5 manors per vill - whilst to the west most vills contained less than this.¹²

The population of the *Nomina Villarum* are variously referred to as lords, head lordships, or head lords.¹³ This group, however, only “represent the tip of a seigniorial iceberg”, as Campbell has demonstrated, using the Hundred Roll evidence of 1279, for Hevingham in east Norfolk. Hevingham had seven head tenants in 1279 compared to the six listed as head lords of Stratton and Hevingham in *Nomina Villarum*.¹⁴ The seven in 1279 included three small ecclesiastical holdings which cannot be “dignified with the title manor” - and are perhaps the result of individual grants by freemen to those bodies. The remaining four were manors but only two had all the basic elements of a conventional manor: demesne, dependent tenants and free tenants.¹⁵

Evidence from the Hundred Rolls has also survived for a number of vills in north-west Norfolk (Holkham, Burnham Thorpe, Kettlestone, Waterden, Sculthorpe, and North, West and East Barsham) which indicates that the ‘seigniorial icebergs’ were not confined to the east of the county, demonstrating as they do that Hevingham “shows no more complexity nor greater division of lordship than Holkham” or a number of its neighbours.¹⁶ Snettisham provides a further example, for it is clear from Domesday, that it was a large and complex vill with a number of berewicks. There were two manors: the larger held by the Bishop of Bayeux and the second by William de Warenne. The former also held an outlier in Shernborne and berewicks at Flitcham, West Newton, Castle Rising and Roydon.¹⁷ In the *Nomina Villarum* of 1316, Snettisham has only one manorial lord: Robert de Mouhat, who also held the hundred.¹⁸ The vill was, however, much more complex than that - Blomefield identifying nine manorial holdings – Snettisham, another held by Wymondham Abbey, Sharnborne’s, Rusteyn’s, Ingoldisthorpe Hall, Downs, Hakons and Verli’s.¹⁹

¹² Bailey, *Medieval Suffolk*, 29

¹³ Blake, 236; Campbell, *Manorial Structure*, 228; Bailey, *Medieval Suffolk*, 28

¹⁴ Campbell, *Manorial Structure*, 232; Blake, 275

¹⁵ Campbell, *Manorial structure*, 237

¹⁶ Hassall, *Beauroy*, 26

¹⁷ *Domesday Book Alecto Edition*, eds Williams, A Martin, G. H., London, (2002) f 163v; (henceforth *Alecto Domesday Book*)

¹⁸ Blake, 267

¹⁹ Blomefield, F., *An Essay towards a Topographic History of Norfolk*, 10, London (1809), 370, 374, 375, 376,

2.3 Manors and the Foldcourse

West and south-west Norfolk thus often displayed significant manorial complexity but the relationship between manors and the ownership of a foldcourse was not simple. At Snettisham, for example there were nine manors but only Snettisham manor held a foldcourse in 1591 - though several of the others had foldage rights in the commons and marsh of the vill (below p.165).²⁰ Similarly, many other vills had more than one manor but not all the manors had a foldcourse. The question of who, in a multi-manorial township, does or does not possess a foldcourse has not previously been explored; and examination of a number of examples suggests that, in general, a foldcourse can be traced back to a Domesday estate.

At Hillington there were five manors: Aubyn's; Uphall; Netherhall; Bury's; and West Dereham.²¹ In 1592, there were three foldcourses: Abbots, Netherhall and Burghall.²² Netherhall descended from the Domesday estate of Eudo fitzSpirewic and by 1305/6 the manor was split into two moieties – one, Netherhall was held by John de Thorpe, the other (Uphall) by a co-heir. Clearly in dividing the manor the foldcourse had remained with Netherhall as the 'parent' manor and had not itself been divided. Bury's Manor (Burghall) descended from the Domesday estate of William de Warrenne and in 1316/7 was held by Sir Robert de Repps of John de Warrenne. The manor of the Abbey of West Dereham (and presumably the holder of the Abbot's foldcourse) is described by Blomefield as descending from a grant of 40 acres from Roger de Pavilly before 1200, to which was attached a liberty of fold; and possibly descends from the third Domesday estate in Hillington held by Berner the Crossbowman.²³ The three foldcourses can thus be traced back with some confidence to the three Domesday estates of Hillington, which estates were of similar size and value (Table 4.1).

The *Nomina Villarum* of 1316 also names three manorial lords for the vill: Earl Warrenne – tenant in chief of Burghall; John de Thorpe who held Netherhall; and Edmund de Pakenham who does not appear in Blomefield's entry for Hillington, but who was perhaps holding West Dereham Manor of the Abbey.²⁴

²⁰ NRO LEST Q 32, p 97

²¹ Blomefield, 8, 460-462

²² NRO MS 26966

²³ Blomefield, 8, 460-462

²⁴ Blake, 266

Table 4.1: Domesday Estates in Hillington²⁵

Element	ESTATES		
	William de Warenne	Eudo fitzSpirewic	Berner the Crossbowman
Land	1 carucate	2 car & 15a	2 car & 15a
Freemen	1		
Villeins	5	8	7
Bordars	6	4	8
Slaves	2		2
Meadow	8a	8a	10a
Demesne ploughs	2	2	2
Men's ploughs	½	1	1
Worth (1086)	60s	£4	100s
Mill	1	1	1

Similarly, at Cockley Cley there were four manors: West Hall, East Hall, Langwade, and Earl Warren's, of which the first two – West and East Hall - had foldcourses in 1581.²⁶ West Hall descended from a Domesday estate held by the King in 1086, and which had liberty of two “fald courses” in the thirteenth century. East Hall manor was based on the estate of Rainald fitzIvo according to Blomefield; it was however a very small estate, consisting of two freemen holding 14 acres and worth 7d. In the thirteenth century it also had a “fald course”.²⁷ West Hall was held by Sir Edmund de Pakenham in 1315/16, who was named as one of two manorial lords in Cockley Cley in the *Nomina Villarum* – which was presumably the source of Blomefield's information.²⁸ The second lord was Thomas de Reppes, and the de Reppes held East Hall in the thirteenth century.²⁹

The situation at Grimston is less clear cut. Blomefield lists nine manors: Breccles; Cordel's and Dunham's; Costeyn's; Bozun's; Morley's; and the Priories of Castle Acre, Coxford, Blackborough and Westacre.³⁰ There were four foldcourses in 1590: Moore flock, East sheep's course, Humfrey Jordan's and the Rectory.³¹ Bozun's manor was conveyed to Humphrey Jordan in 1529/30. It included two folds and had its Domesday origin in an estate of William

²⁵ Aleto Domesday Book, f 160, 285v, 267v

²⁶ Blomefield, 6, 36; NRO MC 2667/12, 2

²⁷ Blomefield, 6, 36, 37; Aleto Domesday Book, f 276; Blomefield, 6, 37

²⁸ Blomefield, 6, 36; Blake, 269

²⁹ Blomefield, 6, 37; Blake, 269

³⁰ Blomefield, 8, 441-452

³¹ NRO BL/CS/6/3/2/2

de Warenne; Jordan had also acquired Westacre priory manor in 1532.³² In addition, the field book of 1590 has a comment to the effect that Humfrey Jordan's foldcourse was "from a rentall in parchment of 30 *Henrici VI*".³³ The rectory at Grimston is described by Blomefield as having 200 acres of glebe with a manor and a sheepwalk.³⁴ The remaining two foldcourses of 1590 cannot with certainty be associated to a manor but one was almost certainly held by Breccles manor which was, in 1086, the capital manor and was held by the Bishop of Bayeux.³⁵ By c. 1300 it was held by the Breccles family and John de Breccles was one of the lords of Grimston in the *Nomina Villarum*.³⁶ There were, in 1086, in addition to the two estates mentioned above, two further ones: that of Roger Bigod which consisted of 5 freemen with 100 acres; and Berner the Crossbowman's of 1 carucate with a mill, one plough and three freemen, two sokemen and six bordars.³⁷ The latter is perhaps more likely to be the origin of a foldcourse right but Blomefield did not know the descent of the estate after the death of the last male heir in 1396.³⁸ The other two lords of Grimston in *Nomina Villarum* were Nicholas Costyn and John de Thunderle. The latter is not mentioned by Blomefield and the former "occurred lord in 9th Edward II" - i.e. the *Nomina Villarum* was the probable source – as the first entry under Costeyn's manor.³⁹

The manorial right to a foldcourse was thus not 'automatic', and in those townships examined above, with more manors than foldcourses, there is a significant correspondence between the Domesday estates and the possession of a foldcourse. In addition, *Nomina Villarum* provides a rule-of-thumb guide to foldcourse numbers. This distinction between the 'haves' and 'have-nots' also supports the comments at the close of the previous chapter concerning foldcourse rights and demonstrates a possible source of evidence for those making the judgements about claims to such rights.

³² Blomefield, 8, 443

³³ NRO BL/CS/6/3/2/2

³⁴ Blomefield, 8, 450

³⁵ Blomefield, 8, 441; Alecto Domesday Book, f 142

³⁶ Blake, 266

³⁷ Alecto Domesday Book, f 183, f 267v

³⁸ Blomefield, 8, 451

³⁹ Blake, 266

3. PATTERNS OF SETTLEMENT

This section will focus on the development of settlement patterns in west Norfolk and Suffolk, the region most closely associated with the foldcourse. The maps produced by Roberts and Wrathnell showing the distribution of settlement nucleation and dispersion in the nineteenth century provide an indication of the distinct regional differences in that pattern between east and west in East Anglia - the east being predominantly dispersed, whilst in the west nucleated settlements predominate.⁴⁰ The same authors identify the two zones as distinctive settlement “sub-provinces”: EWASH(E) covering Cambridgeshire and the western parts of Norfolk and Suffolk; whilst the clay plateau to the east forms the EANGL sub-province. Nucleation is however comparative and, compared to the Midland zone, the extent of nucleation for the EWASH(E) zone is more muted.⁴¹ A re-analysis of the Roberts and Wrathnell data for the density of nucleation in 25 km² squares, produced density figures of 53 and 42 respectively for EWASH(E) and ANGLIA the more easterly zone. By comparison the overall figure for the Central Province was 67.⁴² The Central Province was not, however, one coherent zone, as was shown by the Whittlewood project. This covered a dozen parishes on the borders of Northamptonshire and Buckinghamshire and demonstrated that the medieval settlement pattern was a mixture of both nucleated villages and dispersed settlements.⁴³

A recent review of settlement patterns in Norfolk, Suffolk and Essex, suggested that the areas of ‘nucleation’ include the Tendring peninsula in Essex, parts of the Broads and the Sandlings as well as western Norfolk and Suffolk. The last three are all areas of light soils and where the evidence for former common fields is greatest, and, in the case of the western parts of Norfolk and Suffolk, areas in which the foldcourse system was most deeply entrenched.⁴⁴ One must, however, be cautious of the overall term ‘nucleated’ and the time period under discussion. There is no evidence that nucleation - in the sense of the deliberate re-settlement of inhabitants – occurred in Norfolk before emparking which was a phenomenon of the later seventeenth century.⁴⁵ In Norfolk by the eighth and ninth centuries all modern parishes, except for those on the peat fens, probably contained a settlement site; and in the western half of the county by the

⁴⁰ Roberts, Wrathnell, *Region and Place*, 5,7,9

⁴¹ Roberts, B. K., Wrathnell, S., *An Atlas of Rural settlement in England*, London, (2000) 41,42

⁴² Lowerre, A. G., ‘The Atlas of Rural Settlement in England GIS’, *Landscapes*, 11.2, (2010), 28

⁴³ Jones, R., Page, M., *Medieval Villages in an English Landscape*, Macclesfield, (2006), 233

⁴⁴ Martin, E., ‘Norfolk, Suffolk and Essex: Medieval Rural Settlement in ‘Greater East Anglia’ in *Medieval Rural Settlement*, ed Christie, N., Stamper, P., Oxford, (2012), 234

⁴⁵ Davison, *Deserted Villages*, 32

time of Domesday the distribution of settlements indicates a general association of river and settlement in part of a region where settlement was absent from the dry interfluves.⁴⁶

However, settlement patterns continued to evolve during the subsequent centuries, as Wade-Martins demonstrated in his work on the Launditch hundred.⁴⁷ His conclusion was that the early medieval period saw a shift of settlement from a location around the church to one around the commons or greens within the parish, the subsequent expansion of which led to the “common edge agglomeration” that became a prominent feature of the Norfolk landscape.⁴⁸ He saw this shift as starting in the twelfth century;⁴⁹ whilst others have proposed an earlier, eleventh-century date for Norfolk,⁵⁰ and earlier still in Suffolk.⁵¹ The Launditch hundred is predominantly on the boulder clays of central Norfolk, but the pattern of drift towards common edges was also a feature of the lighter soil areas of the western part of the county and Breckland. Wade-Martins suggested that settlement drift can also be identified at Caldecote on the Brecks and West Dereham on the fen edge.⁵² At Shouldham there was a shift from the now isolated church towards the medieval market place (established by 1334⁵³) as indicated by the intervening earthworks.⁵⁴ Work at Rougham which lies on the boundary of the clays and lighter soils also demonstrated greenside expansion to the west of the present village, though this may be a better fit with Williamson’s description of settlement expansion in the west of the county as “an overflow” from settlements that remained basically nucleated.⁵⁵

Davison examined a number of parishes in the Brecklands, including West and Middle Harling, Bodney and Great and Little Cressingham.⁵⁶ His overall conclusion was that the major settlement sites were confined to the river valleys and that the growth in medieval population led to subsidiary settlements located along the valley between the pastures on the valley floor

⁴⁶ Rogerson, A., ‘Middle Saxon Norfolk’, *An Historical Atlas of Norfolk*, ed Ashwin, T., Davison, A., Chichester, (2005); 32 Williamson, Origins, 112

⁴⁷ Wade-Martins P., ‘The Archaeology of Rural Settlement in East Anglia’, in *The Rural Settlement of Medieval England*, ed Aston, M., Austin, D., Dyer, C., Oxford, (1989), 159

⁴⁸ Wade-Martins, P., *Village Sites in Launditch Hundred*, EAA 10 Gressenhall, (1980), 80; Williamson, Origins, 67,69

⁴⁹ Wade-Martins, *Launditch Hundred*, 87

⁵⁰ Williamson, Origins, 169

⁵¹ Warner, P., *Greens, Commons and Clayland Colonization*, Leicester, (1987) 18

⁵² Wade-Martins, *Launditch Hundred*, 86-87

⁵³ Dymond, D., ‘Medieval and Later Markets’ *Historical Atlas of Norfolk*, 2005, 77

⁵⁴ Cushion, B., Davison, A., *Earthworks of Norfolk*, EAA 104, Gressenhall (2003), 69

⁵⁵ Davison, A., *Six Deserted Villages in Norfolk*, EAA 44, Gressenhall (1988), 48; Williamson, Origins, 170

⁵⁶ Davison A., ‘The Distribution of Medieval Settlement in West Harling’, *Norfolk Archaeology*, 38, (1983), 333,335; *ibid.*, ‘Field Archaeology of Bodney and Stanta Extension’, *Norfolk Archaeology*, 42, (1994) 77

and higher arable land. Examples included Harling Thorpe, described as a manorial cluster or hamlet, Stoneham farm Harling, Illington, and Great and Little Cressingham.⁵⁷ Similarly, at West Wretham there was a separate settlement of Wretham Thorpe that is now a single farm.⁵⁸ At West Acre in the Nar valley, principally on loamy, sandy and chalky soils, the settlement pattern was similar to that of the Brecklands, being confined to the valley with expansion occurring along the same.⁵⁹ Other work in the Nar valley has identified further examples of dispersed settlement. At Marham the medieval focus was at the south-west end of the present village around Holy Trinity church but there was a second church a few hundred metres to the south-east and ruinous by 1500 - but perhaps a former focus of settlement. In addition, medieval pottery scatters at the eastern end of the parish c.1 km from the present village indicated a further settlement site.⁶⁰ At Middleton, the primary focus was clearly the church and the high-status indicator of a motte-and-bailey castle, but there were four other medieval settlements ‘attached’ to the vill.⁶¹ At Tottenhill there were three settlement sites – the vill itself, Tottenhill Row, for which there is evidence of a probable common edge settlement, and the deserted vill of West Briggs.⁶²

West Briggs is of interest for another reason, as it is one of three former settlements in west Norfolk for which there is a Domesday entry regarding freemen and soke of the fold - the others are Thorpland, near Downham Market and Toombers (see table 3.2). The name Toombers survives as a wood, situated at the confluence of four modern parish boundaries, indicative of its isolated status. The majority of the wood is in Shouldham Thorpe but portions of it are also in Stow Bardolph, Crimpleham and Stradsett. It is however secondary woodland, containing significant areas of ridge and furrow within it.⁶³

A contrast to this general pattern is provided by Beachamwell, where the settlement is described as “straggling in an irregular crescent”.⁶⁴ The vill had three churches and Davison suggests that it may be an example of a poly-focal settlement located around the churches. The neighbouring parish of Barton Bendish provides a further and more detailed example of such

⁵⁷ Cushion B, Davison A, ‘The Earthworks at Harling Thorpe’ *Norfolk Archaeology*, 41, (1991), 208

⁵⁸ Saltmarsh, J. Darby, H. C., ‘The Infield-Outfield System on a Norfolk Manor’, *Economic History*, 3, (1935), 31 fn 2

⁵⁹ Davison, A., ‘The Archaeology of the Parish of West Acre’, *Norfolk Archaeology*, 44, (2004) 204, 477

⁶⁰ Silvester, R. J., *The Fenland Project 3, Marshland and Nar Valley*, EAA 45, Gressenhall, (1988), 121,125

⁶¹ Silvester, 126

⁶² Silvester, 135, 136

⁶³ Williamson, T., personal communication

⁶⁴ Davison, *Six Deserted Villages*, 103

a phenomenon and had by 1086 two churches and later a third.⁶⁵ Such generous ecclesiastical provision is not uncommon in East Anglia, especially Norfolk, where Warner identified 38 examples, evenly distributed across the county.⁶⁶ From field-walking and other evidence it is clear that the western part of the village, around St Mary's church, was well established by the late Saxon period. At this time the settlement may however have had two foci, with a second smaller one around St Andrew's church and further sites "widely strung" along the street. (Fig 4.1) The third church was probably established in the eleventh century and by the medieval period the principal settlement extended some 1.5 km along the street; whilst by c.1100 a subsidiary settlement, called Eastmoor, had been established about 3 km to the south east. This was also a street or row settlement.⁶⁷ The authors suggest that this pattern is the result of an earlier one of dispersed settlement followed by a bi-focal phase; and question to what extent the presence of three churches and multiple manors influenced the layout of the settlement – was it in fact, in the eleventh century a single village or three separate but adjacent vills? Finally, they point out that most of ninth to eleventh century Barton Bendish is underneath the present village and that such settlement stability "is abnormal for Norfolk".⁶⁸

The issues of settlement shrinkage and desertion were summarised in Chapter 1(p.28), and Davison catalogues a number of such settlements in north-west Norfolk - Bawsey, Mintlyn which was in Bawsey, Little Ringstead, Choseley and Southmere in Docking.⁶⁹ The index of Norwich Cathedral Charters included several references to settlements in the north and west of the county that have 'disappeared': Heachamthorpe c.1280 and Ditton in Hunworth 1212; neither of which are recorded on the county Historic Environment Record (NHER).⁷⁰

The Cathedral Charters also make reference to two sites in Sedgeford – Gnattington and Etone in 1157 and 1313 respectively.⁷¹ The latter (now Eaton) is still extant as a farm a kilometre to the west of the village, and East Hall, 2 km to the east is the site of Gnattington. A recent report of the SHARP project at Sedgeford proposes that there was a settlement shift from south of the river Heacham to the north and the present site of the village, as "a new settlement focus of the

⁶⁵ Rogerson, A. Davison, A. Pritchard, D. Silvester, R., *Barton Bendish and Caldecote: fieldwork in south west Norfolk*, East Anglian Archaeology, 80, Gressenhall, (1987), 5

⁶⁶ Warner, P., 'Shared Churchyards, freemen church builders and the development of parishes in eleventh century East Anglia' *Landscape History*, 8, 40

⁶⁷ Rogerson *et al*, 25, 31

⁶⁸ Rogerson *et al*, 25

⁶⁹ Davison, *Deserted Villages*, 73-84

⁷⁰ Dodwell, B., ed *The Charters of Norwich Cathedral Priory I*, London, (1974), docs 34, 328

⁷¹ *Ibid*, doc 35; II doc 68

Saxo-Norman period”.⁷² One should not, however, ignore the continued existence of the settlements at East Hall (Gnattington) and Eaton. There was also a further hamlet at Southgate and all of these locations existed as separate identities, in a polyfocal pattern until the seventeenth century at least.⁷³ A further example of polyfocal settlement has been explored at Hindringham, where test pitting has suggested the presence of three “distinct nodes” of late Saxon settlement that continued to expand until the fourteenth century.⁷⁴ At Grimston, the deserted settlement of Wyveling is described in a field book of 1581 as “closes and meadows and sheeps course or warren, the latter containing 446 acres.”⁷⁵ The earthworks of Wyveling are still visible (NHER 3324) and there were two further settlement sites in Grimston – NHER 19618, 19619.⁷⁶

The pattern of settlement in Suffolk is less easy to deduce given that there are no surviving earthworks of deserted medieval village sites, but was not dissimilar to that of Norfolk.⁷⁷ Warner has suggested that in some parts of clayland Suffolk, based on the presence nearby of late Saxon churches, settlements were established around commons or greens, in a fashion similar to Launditch hundred, by the ninth or tenth century.⁷⁸ In the poor and acid soils of the Sandlings, the late Saxon polyfocal settlement pattern persisted and increased into the medieval period – alongside roads, or often around greens and commons, in a similar fashion to the pattern of the claylands of the same county; resulting, at a number of locations, in the church becoming isolated.⁷⁹

⁷² Faulkner, N., A Potted History of Anglo Saxon Sedgeford, SHARP Interim Report (2009), 13. <http://ccgi.sedgeford.plus.com/~sedgeford/blog>

⁷³ Williamson, *Medieval Landscapes*, 86

⁷⁴ Lewis, C., ‘Exploring Black Holes: Recent Investigations in Currently Occupied Rural Settlements in Eastern England’, in *Landscape Archaeology of Anglo Saxon England*, ed Higham, N. J., Ryan, M. J., Woodbridge, (2010), 93

⁷⁵ NRO BL/CS/6/3/2/2

⁷⁶ www.heritage.norfolk.gov.uk/parishes, Grimston, accessed 3/2014

⁷⁷ Wade-Martins, *Rural Settlement in East Anglia*, 153

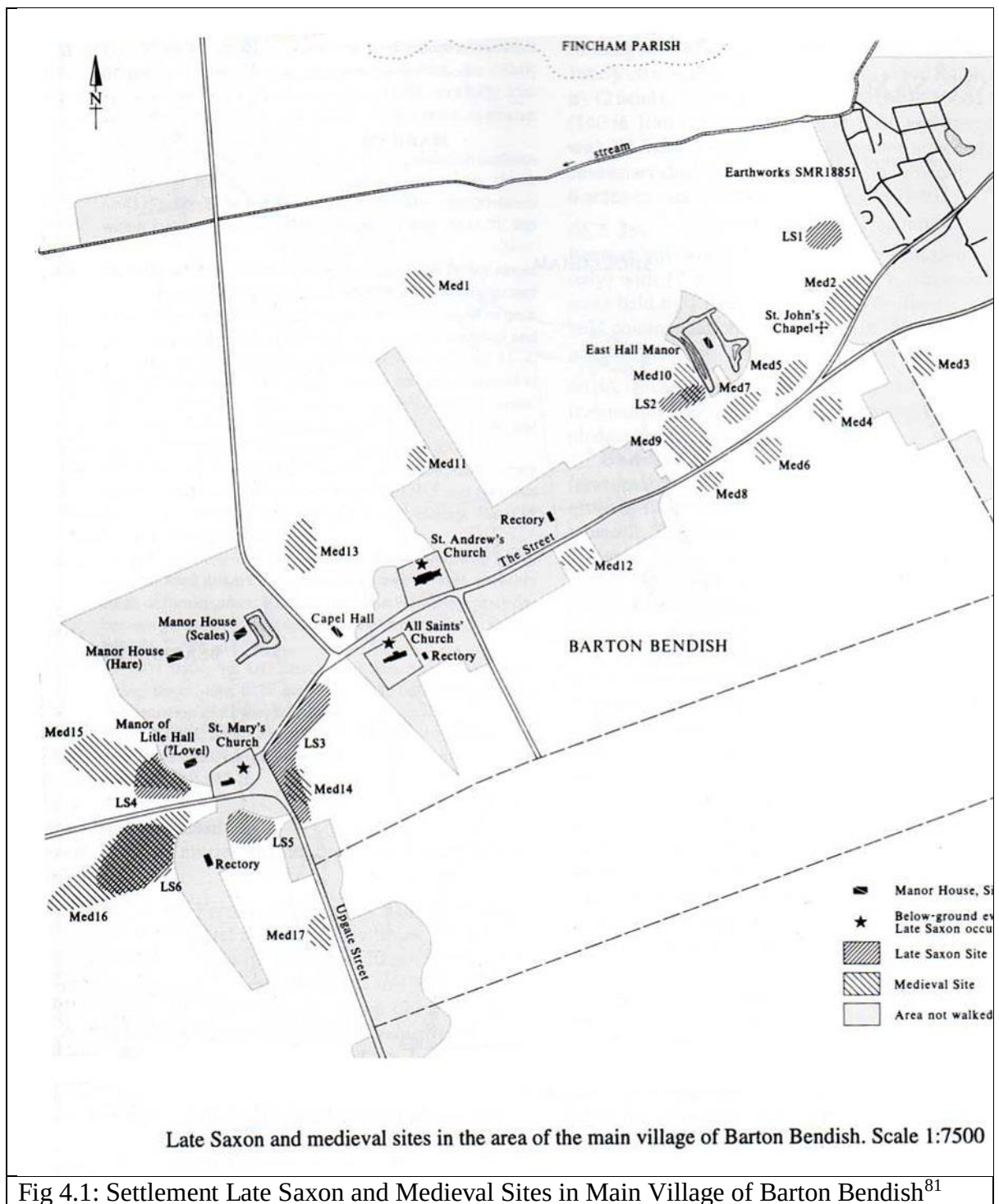
⁷⁸ Warner, *Greens, Commons*, 18

⁷⁹ Williamson, T., *Sandlands*, Macclesfield, (2005), 77

3.1 Discussion

For most of Norfolk and Suffolk, outside of the fens, the topographic constraints were limited; the principal one being the need, particularly on the freely draining soils such as the Brecklands, for a reliable water supply. The settlement pattern was an initial nucleus of church and manorial properties, followed by dispersion either to distinctively separate sites, along the edge of commons, or to rows extending out from existing settlements. Many settlements in west Norfolk and the Sandlings subsequently resembled a nucleated settlement through a process of infilling between polyfocal sites, as the density figures above indicate. The majority of these locations had not, however, even in the nineteenth century, reached the tight knit pattern of the Midlands. The timing of such nucleation is also problematic - in the Sandlings it was a late phenomenon.⁸⁰ In west Norfolk, I would suggest that “nucleation” was an extended process – Sedgeford illustrates well how long the time span could be over which settlements could remain as a polyfocal group. In most cases the settlements through a continuation of the processes of shift, infill, abandonment, and re-arrangement agglomerated into what might be described as an approximation of a nucleated village.

⁸⁰ Ibid, 77



⁸¹ Rogerson *et al*, fig 13

4. FIELD SYSTEMS

The links between common or open fields and the sheepfold were, in Kerridge's view, intimate, for he saw the fold being one of the "compelling reasons" for the origin of common fields, and believed that folding...was "the cause...of the origin and continuance...of common fields".⁸² He later backtracked somewhat on this bold assertion, and came to view the origins of the common fields as lying in the inter-relationship between "common fields, flocks, and folds" and he suggested, "all arose at the same time from the same common cause". The "cause" was the need to maintain the fertility of the soil and this could best be achieved if the sheep of the tenants, who, individually, could only keep small flocks, were collected into one common flock which would then have a greater impact. In addition, the common fields provided a larger area of fallow.⁸³

The layout, organisation and management of the 'arable units' that constitute the fields of East Anglia have been the subject of much research and discussion. This section will examine a number of models of field systems as they apply to East Anglia, compare East Anglian examples to the 'Midland system', and review the historiography of East Anglian fields. Then will follow a discussion of the layout of holdings, particularly with regard to the foldcourse, and finally discuss the interaction of settlement and field systems and how, particularly in west Norfolk, the agrarian regime was managed.

4.1 Some Definitions

Fields: common or open?

The two terms are often used synonymously, but I will follow Thirsk's definition that 'common' fields are worked under a common field system with communal grazing rights whilst an 'open' field is one lying in strips but not subject to common grazing rights.⁸⁴ I shall use the term open fields given the various, limited, and much argued over, nature of grazing rights in East Anglia, especially in Norfolk.

⁸² Kerridge, Common Fields, 34

⁸³ Ibid, 49

⁸⁴ Thirsk, The Origin of the Common Fields, 53

Fields and Furlongs

‘Field’ is a slippery term in the East Anglian context. It was sometimes used in the sense of one of several large and roughly equally sized blocks of arable land as in the Midland open fields, - but often it was not. In addition, ‘field’ was often used and confused with various terms for the subdivisions of the ‘field’.⁸⁵ These sub-divisions – furlongs within the Midland system – could, in East Anglia be variously labelled furlong, wong, *cultura*, or one of a number of other terms.⁸⁶ The morphology of the fields in the Midland system consisting of relatively large fields of approximately equal size was uncommon in East Anglia where fields varied widely between different locations and the ‘fields’ themselves were of different size and shape.⁸⁷

The Layout of Individual Holdings

Clusters or clustering is the unequal distribution of individual tenant’s arable holdings within the fields, such that they tend to be concentrated in one area. Alternatively, holdings may be distributed more widely in a township’s fields so that they are not concentrated in one area. In discussing the character of peasant holdings in East Anglia I shall use these two terms: clustered and scattered. I have also assumed that the distribution of holdings in the open field will, over time, tend to become more clustered or coherent and not more scattered. Whilst tenancies and ownership of individual parcels were in constant flux, it is difficult to envisage that, overall, this would have led to a clustered/coherent pattern being broken up to form a more scattered one.

4.2 Modelling Field Systems in East Anglia

Campbell in his modelling of the functional aspects of common fields, identifies 14 ‘functional attributes’ of a field system, and it is of note that the largest single group (five) concerns the grazing of the fallow.⁸⁸ Examination of these attributes allows us to identify five principal types of field system, of which the following are relevant in the context of a ‘greater’ East Anglia. One is irregular commonfield systems with non-regulated cropping; in which the arable is in

⁸⁵ Martin, Satchell, 25

⁸⁶ *Ibid*, 35

⁸⁷ Bailey, M., ‘The form, function and evolution of irregular field systems in Suffolk, c. 1300 to c. 1550’ *Agric History Review*, 57.1 (2009), 18; Martin & Satchell, 35

⁸⁸ Campbell, B. M. S., ‘Commonfield Origins’ – The Regional Dimension’ in *The Origins of Open Field Agriculture*, ed Rowley, T., London, (1981), 113

severalty whilst the fallow is available for common grazing for part or the whole of a cycle. Such systems can be further sub-divided into those where common grazing rights were confined to post-harvest shack – as in eastern Norfolk - and those in which such rights included both the post-harvest period and the fallow land.⁸⁹ The second broad type embraces irregular commonfields with partially regulated cropping; that is where the fallow is subject to rights of common grazing, leading to the imposition of cropping shifts, as in the case of the foldcourse with its manorial control and grazing restrictions; or in some parts of western Cambridgeshire where there was communal control over the limited rights of common grazing and cropping shifts. In Campbell's classification the 'Midland' system is a regular commonfield with communal control of common grazing over the fallow and the imposition of common rotations.⁹⁰

Bailey has utilised Campbell's approach to classify the field systems of medieval Suffolk c. 1300 and to explore their subsequent development. Thus in Breckland and the Sandlings there were irregular common fields with partially regulated cropping, such as shackle to accommodate the needs of the foldcourse, and the arable lands of both demesne and tenants were "scattered" as opposed to being clustered in one part of the arable.⁹¹ In the central zone of the county there was an area of highly irregular open fields and small enclosures with the individual holdings clustered rather than dispersed. Cropping patterns were not regulated, and communal pasturing was limited to the post-harvest fallows.⁹² In the third zone, in the north-east and parts of the south of the county, both the fields and pastures were predominantly enclosed.⁹³

The most recent study of East Anglian fields provides a detailed analysis of the field systems of twelve locations in greater East Anglia, predominantly lying in the centre and east of the region.⁹⁴ The twelve ranged from two (Ingatestone and Felsted in Essex) which provided no evidence of there ever having been common fields to five where the proportion of common fields was over 50% of the parish area.⁹⁵ The authors classified the locations that they studied into three types:

⁸⁹ Ibid, 114

⁹⁰ Ibid, 115

⁹¹ Bailey, form, function and evolution, 19

⁹² Ibid, 24

⁹³ Ibid, 29

⁹⁴ Martin, Satchell, 5

⁹⁵ Ibid., 48

1. Midland - of which there were no examples in the study area.
2. A second group that was sub-divided on the basis of evidence for communal arrangements such as folding or cropping.
 - 2a. The distribution of holdings tended to be equal and some form of communal arrangement was present
 - 2b. This second sub-group had clustered holdings and less evidence of communal arrangements
3. Parishes where common fields comprised a minority of the cultivated area, and where there were few if any communal arrangements and landholdings were concentrated near holdings which took the form of subdivided closes rather than common fields in the true sense.⁹⁶

It is type 2a which covers the largest area of East Anglia as mapped by the authors, extending across central and west Norfolk, west Suffolk and eastern Cambridgeshire- all districts that are associated with the foldcourse, although their study includes only two places actually located in those areas - Swanton Morley and Dullingham.⁹⁷ This distribution is also broadly consistent with Campbell's field system type of 'irregular commonfield systems with partially regulated cropping'; and with areas of polyfocal and loosely nucleated settlement.

There are thus a number of variables of form and function to consider when attempting to describe the typology of the field arrangements of any given parish in East Anglia: whether the field itself has any functional importance; whether the layout of individual holdings was clustered, or scattered more evenly across the fields or furlongs; the relationship between the nature of the layout of holdings and the pattern of settlement; the balance between individual and communal control with regard to cropping regimes and pasturing; and change over time – for as Bailey points out, irregular field systems were both more flexible and characteristic of a number of the most agriculturally productive regions of medieval England - as compared, to the static situation in regions such as the Midlands.⁹⁸

⁹⁶ Ibid, 22

⁹⁷ Ibid, 210

⁹⁸ Bailey, form, function and evolution, 16

4.3 The Midland System

Northamptonshire provides an archetype both of the ‘Midland system’ of open-field agriculture; and of Roberts and Wrathnell’s Central Province, which consisted of predominantly nucleated villages and associated “extensive open fields”.⁹⁹

The Midland system has also been seen as an ‘ideal’ towards which, according to some authors, all other field systems were evolving. Thus, Postgate, writing in 1964, had described the field systems of north and west Cambridgeshire as part of “a regular Midland field system”, possessing a “mature...pattern” with furlongs that were amalgamated into more ‘conventional’ open fields.¹⁰⁰ This characterisation was made in comparison to the more diverse pattern found in the south-east of the county, the implication being of a ‘goal’ whereby the Midland system, mature and conventional, should be the target. Harrison has commented on the ‘drawbacks’ to such an evolutionary approach in relation to the co-axial parishes of the same area, where the evolution of a more ordered system was not ‘arrested’ but was a response to the particular agrarian conditions of that locality which were different from the rest of the county.¹⁰¹ Campbell has similarly questioned whether one should view “the Midland system as the ‘norm’ from which other field systems deviated?”¹⁰² However, Postgate subsequently described the fields of south-east Cambridgeshire as having developed “according to that common in East Anglia”, recognising a distinctive and different response to the development of field systems.

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The basic organisational unit of the Midland field system was the field which was itself composed of a number of furlongs. In most townships there were initially two open fields, but by the fourteenth century three fields were becoming increasingly common. Theoretically the switch from a two to three fields would have increased yields by one third but Hall describes such a suggestion as “of doubtful validity” given the increased intensification of arable use and decline in available grazing.¹⁰⁴ A three-field system was also more demanding – the land was cropped four years out of six, rather than three in six, had a “smaller carrying capacity” for grazing animals and a reduced input of manure.¹⁰⁵

⁹⁹ Hall, D., *The Open Fields of Northamptonshire*, Northamptonshire Record Society 38, Northampton (1995) x; Roberts, Wrathnell, *Region and Place*, 119

¹⁰⁰ Postgate, PhD, 14, 15

¹⁰¹ Harrison, *Open Fields and Earlier Landscapes*, 46

¹⁰² Campbell, *Commonfield Origins*, 112

¹⁰³ Postgate, *Field Systems*, 295

¹⁰⁴ Hall, *Northamptonshire*, 51, 63

¹⁰⁵ Fox, H. S. A., ‘The Alleged Transformation from Two-Field to Three-Field Systems in Medieval England’ *Economic History Review*, 34,4 (1986), 542

Recent research has, however, demonstrated that medieval Northamptonshire was “rather less arable” than is often assumed. Overall, around 66% of the county was under cultivation c. 1300 which, with the predominance of two-field systems meant only around a third of the land was cropped each year.¹⁰⁶ Some Northamptonshire townships - Brixworth and Wollaston for example - retained three fields until Parliamentary enclosure in the second half of the eighteenth century, but a number of townships developed layouts based on four, five, six or occasionally more fields. The reasons for this development included, in some cases, the creation of separate demesne and tenant fields, the adoption of new crops and rotations; whilst at Newnham and Finedon the increased number was driven by the need to deal with the variability in soil quality. Newnham thus had five fields, three under a three-course rotation, with the other two fallowed every other year.¹⁰⁷ Transitions, such as from two to three fields, did not involve any redistribution of lands and property rights were not disturbed. Examples of these formal re-arrangements include Newnham, which had two fields until 1618, when a three-field arrangement was adopted although excluding some furlongs used to grow rye, thus creating the five-field system noted above. At Harlestone, prior to 1410, the two fields had been divided into three but these were of unequal size. In that year it was agreed - between six manorial lords and “the representatives of the village” - to remove the inequality.¹⁰⁸ Six lords in one township has overtones of East Anglia, and certainly indicates that Northamptonshire was by no means exclusively a one vill-one manor county. There were often two or more manors within the same vill: at Kislingbury and Raunds for example each had two manors, and Barnwell had two manors, two parishes and one field system.¹⁰⁹

A single medieval farm (yardland) “consisted of many strips distributed fairly uniformly” across the [fields] and furlongs of the township”.¹¹⁰ The regularity of the distributional pattern reached an apogee at Hardingstone, where an estate of 32 yardlands had a repeating cycle of 32 names in each furlong, and similar examples occur at Mears Ashby and Great Billing. The earliest evidence for the regular holding pattern comes from Muscott in 1433 but the majority of evidence for the regularity of the layout of holdings comes from sixteenth’ and seventeenth century’ surveys. Hall argues that the earlier regularity can be seen beneath the later evidence, as at Hardingstone where a 1660 survey shows yardlands which had been divided between

¹⁰⁶ Williamson, T., Liddiard, R., Partida, T., *Champion*, Liverpool, (2013), 106

¹⁰⁷ Hall, Northamptonshire, 53, 54, 55

¹⁰⁸ Hall, Northamptonshire, 58

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, 68, 190

¹¹⁰ Ibid, 8

other owners, that division was also regular.¹¹¹ By contrast a number of townships did display an irregular layout of holdings – at Raunds for example. Such irregularity has been ascribed to the breakdown and re-aggregation of farms or to an “active property market”; and overall, there is, for Northamptonshire, “widespread evidence” for a regular distribution of holdings within the open fields in the middle ages.¹¹² Demesne holdings could be either clustered or dispersed, with around a third being the former.¹¹³ By contrast, at Wollaston and Mears Ashby the demesne formed a single block, and it is often unclear how such “block demesnes” related to the cultivation of the open fields within which they were set.¹¹⁴ Hall discusses a number of possible reasons for this contrast: the move from two fields to three may have led to a dispersal of demesne lands; block demesne could be the result of exchanges; and that compact demesnes are often associated with high-status manors.

The cropping unit of the open field was the furlong.¹¹⁵ But the first step in the regime was that one field was set aside, in its entirety, to form a single block of fallow - for the field was the fallowing unit and the “determining principle” of the Midland open-field system.¹¹⁶ Each field lay fallow every second year in a two field-operation. In this case the remaining field could presumably be divided into two blocks to be sown with winter and spring sown crops, or the whole sown as one or other. The fact that the furlong was the cropping unit gave the system “great flexibility” in terms of production, but there is “no doubt about the fundamental...integrity of the great fields in the middle ages”; with their inflexibility of field course and freedom of cropping.¹¹⁷ A widely used rotation, in a three-field system of Northamptonshire, was winter sown/spring sown/fallow, but there are examples where one of the two cropped fields was planted with wheat and barley (i.e. winter and spring sown) and the other with peas and beans.¹¹⁸

The regulation of the common fields – both of the grazing in the fallow field and of crop husbandry - was a communal activity involving all those with “a stake in the system”. Whilst records of the meetings of those ‘stakeholders’ are rare, the results, in terms of local bye-laws

¹¹¹ Ibid, 117, 118

¹¹² Ibid, 119, 122

¹¹³ Ibid, 72

¹¹⁴ Ibid, 69, 73

¹¹⁵ Hall, Northamptonshire, 17; Fox, *Alleged Transformation*, 528

¹¹⁶ Hall, Northamptonshire, 8; Fox, *Alleged Transformation*, 528, 529; Ault, W. O., *Open Field Farming in Medieval England*, London, (1972), 16

¹¹⁷ Fox, *Alleged Transformation*, 528

¹¹⁸ Hall, Northamptonshire, 34, 8

are increasingly recorded after c.1300.¹¹⁹ In villis with more than one manor and therefore more than one manorial court “it is well-nigh impossible” to ascertain how the open fields were managed.¹²⁰ Although, this assumes that the manorial court rather than a village assembly was the organisational body, and in a township with more than one manor it could also have been the chief manor. As was common elsewhere, the number of animals a yardlander could keep was stinted, but the beasts of the community were managed as a single herd or flock for grazing the fallow.¹²¹ In some villis at least the lord of the manor did claim rights over the manure – villeins being required to put their sheep on the lord’s fold at Barnwell in 1342 and similarly at Clopton in 1250 where this applied to smallholders but not yardlanders.¹²²

The two things that were unique to the open fields of the Midlands (or the “Central Province”) were communal grazing of the fallow and the regular distribution of the landholdings between the fields.¹²³ It was also a system with a long duration and stability; and whilst as has been indicated it was not a monolith, once established, one might suggest that the management of the fields by the community could probably have run with limited organisational input year on year.

4.4 Historiography of East Anglian Fields

The first overview of field systems in England was by Gray in 1915 and he emphasised the essentially ‘non-Midland’ nature of East Anglian field systems and pasturing arrangements. He argued that there was, in East Anglia, no ‘system’ in the Midland sense but an irregular pattern of both fields and of the distribution of arable holdings, with limited communal control of pasturing, when compared to the Midlands. He also viewed field systems as a cultural artefact: thus those of the Midland system were an “essentially Teutonic” import; whilst those of East Anglia he “tentatively attributed” to the Danes.¹²⁴ Gray also argued that fields in the Midland sense as a unit of description and management were not apparent in sixteenth-century Norfolk and the meaning of the term ‘field’ in a survey was “inconsequential” and that the “designation had merely a topographical connotation”.¹²⁵ Campbell goes further, suggesting that the division

¹¹⁹ Fox, *Approaches to the Midland System*, 65, 75

¹²⁰ Ault, 73

¹²¹ Hall, *Northamptonshire*, 9

¹²² *Ibid*, 15

¹²³ Hall, *Medieval Fields*, 19

¹²⁴ Gray, H.L., *English Field Systems*, London (1959), 415, 416

¹²⁵ Gray, 313, 314, 324

of some parishes into precincts was an artificial construct by the surveyors in order to make the description easier.¹²⁶

Given the “haphazard” nature of the fields or precincts (an assembly of furlongs or *quarentenae*), Gray goes on to suggest that an equal distribution of holdings within such an arrangement is unlikely, and that sixteenth-century evidence from Holkham indicates that the distribution of arable strips was “chronically irregular”.¹²⁷ The examples are principally concerned with manorial lands which may not represent the way the strips were tenanted and farmed, and it is of note that in the example, where the division is equally between two fields, the holding is of an individual (Galfridus Porter) rather than manorial.¹²⁸ Overall, Gray concludes that “in Norfolk a tenant’s arable acres were likely to be concentrated within a particular precinct or field” i.e. clustered.¹²⁹ As a result of the ‘non-Midland’ nature of the East Anglian fields, they were in Gray’s view more “flexible”, allowing for changes to the acreages of individual crops, and that communal arrangements played no part in an individual tenant’s cropping regime. In addition, given this flexibility, lack of communal control, and concentration of holdings, a three-course rotation was still feasible, though the courses “naturally consisted, as far as possible, of neighbouring parcels”.¹³⁰

Postgate, in his review of East Anglian field systems broadly agreed with Gray, that the unequal distribution of holdings was a distinguishing feature of such systems and that “holdings, while not completely consolidated, possessed a marked tendency to concentration in one part of the township’s lands”. He quoted the example of Walsingham, where in 1485 one tenant had land in 19 of the 27 *stadia* in East Field and in 6 out of 16 *stadia* in North Field but none in the 48 *stadia* of west Field.¹³¹ A map of Stetchworth (Cambs) in 1770 (Fig 5.1) similarly shows one individual’s open-field holdings, which are distributed across three fields (or shifts): the majority (26) are in Noughts Hill shift, with ten in Ditch Field shift and two in Waste Field shift. Whether this is a picture of clustering is questionable. The individual strips are not close together, and assuming the shift equals a unit of cropping, the individual had numbers of strips in two of the crop rotations, although few in Waste Field shift - a name indicative of more

¹²⁶ Campbell, *Extent & Layout of Common Fields*, 12

¹²⁷ Gray, 313, 314

¹²⁸ Gray, 330

¹²⁹ Gray, 323

¹³⁰ Gray, 324

¹³¹ Postgate, *Field Systems*, 307, 308.

marginal land and perhaps less frequently cropped. In addition, the neighbouring parish of Dullingham has been described as providing strong indications of having holdings that were evenly distributed around the field when compared to the other East Anglian parishes.¹³²

What may be true of parts of Cambridgeshire, was certainly the case in Breckland, where such concentration of holdings did not occur. The demesne holdings of the Bishop of Ely at Feltwell in 1277 were in five ‘felds’; and at Elveden in 1617-18, holdings were fairly evenly spread across six shifts, and tenants “have many several lands...in each and every of the six shifts and felde”.¹³³ Bailey provides a number of further examples from Breckland that also appear to indicate a layout more akin to that of the Midland system: thus at Methwold, Thomas de Gunton’s holdings were distributed across seventeen *quarentenae*; while in sixteenth-century Brandon most tenant holdings were evenly spread throughout the ten townfields and Bailey suggests that for such dispersion was a form of risk aversion, engendered by the infertility of the soil.¹³⁴ It might also suggest a mosaic pattern of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ soils as discussed previously (p 46).

More recent studies of field systems in Norfolk – in the east and north-west of the county – have come to similar conclusions to Gray, that the distribution of holdings was clustered. Campbell’s study of a number of parishes in eastern Norfolk indicates that, by the sixteenth century, the fields displayed “a persuasive irregularity” with no evidence that they were ever arranged with the sort of order and regularity of the Midland system. It was the individual parcels and holdings which were the basis of the management of the common fields, with the parcels of individual holdings “extremely unevenly distributed with a marked tendency towards clustering in different parts of the parish”; whilst the common rights over the open fields were minimal and restricted to harvest shack.¹³⁵

In South Creake, in north-west Norfolk, Hesse suggests that the evidence from Domesday indicates a similar “fragmentation of manorial control” and that by the sixteenth century strips of land held of a number of manors “were mingled in the same furlongs” of the open fields.¹³⁶

¹³² Martin, Satchell, 21

¹³³ Postgate, Breckland, 97,98

¹³⁴ Bailey, A Marginal Economy, 50, 51

¹³⁵ Campbell, Extent & Layout of Common Fields, 12, 13, 14

¹³⁶ Hesse, M., ‘Medieval field Systems & Land Tenure in South Creake, Norfolk’ *Norfolk Archaeology*, 43, (1998), 81

A map showing the distribution of holdings in the thirteenth century is based principally on grants to Creak Abbey, which were concentrated in the West field, near to the settlement; with some in North field and a few in the South field. Hesse argues, on the basis of furlong names, together with the similarity of the proportion of each manor's lands in each field in a 1475 terrier, that this is a "fair" representation of the manorial land as a whole, and not a concentration of Creak Abbey properties in one field.¹³⁷ The naming of fields by compass points implies a three-field system but a terrier of 1559 makes clear that they were in fact laid out in the typical irregular fashion of East Anglia with 18 precincts and 151 *quarantenaes*.¹³⁸

4.5 The Distribution of Holdings

The foregoing historiography describes, in general, a retreat from Gray's original hypothesis of East Anglia as a region of clustered holdings. This "retreat" applies particularly in the west of the region. The indication from a number of the examples summarised above is that they broadly fit within Martin & Satchell's type 2a field system in which the distribution of holdings tended to be equal and there was some form of communal arrangement. The exception is Campbell's study of east Norfolk which fits type 2b with clustered holdings and less evidence of communal arrangements. In this section I will explore further the degree to which, in west Norfolk the holdings in the open fields were dispersed, drawing on evidence from a number of different townships. The majority of the evidence is of a relatively late date and its value is based, in part at least, on my assumption that the distribution of holdings in the open field will, over time, tend to become more clustered or coherent and not more scattered.

Several of the examples of clustered holdings that Gray describes, whilst clearly illustrating that aspect are also illustrative of other complexities. At Castle Acre, in 1582/3, the overall distribution of individual holdings is certainly skewed but could this be the result of other factors?¹³⁹ For example, the individual holdings that are described cover a wide range of total acreages – is it therefore appropriate to compare Wingfield with 5 messuages and nearly 500 acres with Ellven and Alcock each with 1 messuage and 22 and 12 acres respectively? In addition, a significant number of the tenures are freehold - Wingfield, Gaye and Bell all hold more than 90% of their land as freehold whilst Lackford's is entirely freehold though only one

¹³⁷ Hesse, 82, 83

¹³⁸ Hesse, 81

¹³⁹ Gray, 315

messuage and 56 acres of which 49 acres are in West field. A similar concentration can be seen with Jent who had 29 acres of freehold land in West Field and a quarter of an acre in Middle Field; Gaye had 39 acres of freehold land in in West Field and five acres in Middle Field; Bell had 141 acres of freehold in Middle Field and 29 acres in the other two fields; finally, Wingfield who held nearly 490 acres, 93% of which was freehold – the majority (264 acres) in East Field, 96 acres in Middle Field and 20 acres in West Field. This may therefore be a picture of engrossment rather than clustering. The distribution of customary holdings (Table 4.2) displays a more mixed situation: Jent had a fairly even spread of such holdings and three of the four tenants with a single messuage have lands in all three fields.

Table 4.2: The Distribution and Size (acres) of Non-freeholdings at Castle Acre, 1582/3

HOLDER	MESSUAGES	WEST FIELD	MIDDLE FIELD	EAST FIELD
Wingfield	5	15.5	1.75	12.5
Gaye	4	2	1.25	0
Jent	3	28	19	47
Wood	3	13		
Bell	2	4.5		
Mower	1	14.5	19	2.25
Warde	1	4.5	15	1.25
Alcock	1	4.75	0.5	1.25
Ellven	1			5

On the fringes of Breckland in south-west Norfolk the pattern of scattered holdings is also present. At Cockley Cley a field book of 1581, refers to two fields (North and South) in the township but only with regard to the demesne holdings.¹⁴⁰ Thomas Dusgate, held 772 acres of predominantly freehold land in the township, distributed across 59 furlongs, in 250 parcels of which the average size was 3 acres, and the largest concentration was in Twenty Penny furlong where he held 34 acres in nine parcels. An estate of this size may have been leased in smaller, and more clustered, parcels but Table 4.3 which contains similar data for four smaller estates held in a mixture of free and copyhold, illustrates a scattered pattern.

¹⁴⁰ NRO MC 2667/12, 991X5

Table 4.3: Distribution of Landholdings by Number of furlongs and parcels of land in Cockley Cley

LANDHOLDER	ACRES	FURLONGS	PARCELS
Newman	44	21	29
Bagge	42	14	19
Hanson	31	13	16
Johnson	27	15	17

Similarly, at Barton Bendish the holdings of Abbot's farm (West Dereham abbey) were widely distributed.¹⁴¹ In Fincham, Shouldham and Shouldham Thorpe, there were 22 landowners holding between 20 and 60 acres; of whom 21 held land in all four of the principal fields of each township. In Fincham the fields were Langholm, East, North and South, Henry Camplin held 4½, 4, 5¾ and 7 acres in each respectively; whilst Thomas Nicolls had 18, 14, 15¼ and 13 acres.¹⁴²

4.6 The Sedgeford Holdings of Richard de Stanford

A more detailed example of the distribution of an individual's holdings, in the Good Sands region, is provided by a charter of Norwich Cathedral Priory. In 1275, Richard de Stanford granted to the Priory a messuage, described as abutting a pond (*stagnum*) called Kyme, with 69½ acres of land in Sedgeford.¹⁴³ The grant includes a description and a location for most of the 22 parcels of land. The following is an attempt to identify and map those holdings; however, the site of the messuage itself has not been located. Two sources were used to identify the possible locations of the various parcels. The first is a dragge of Sedgeford of 1581/82, from which the locations by precinct were drawn, principally, from a summary of "Sedgeford lands belonging to the manor of Sedgeford as they be declared in this book" and an index.¹⁴⁴ This source was limited by the letters B & C being mostly hidden due to the stitching of the document. The second source of 1631 includes an alphabetical list of lands located by precinct and *quarentena*.¹⁴⁵ The charter lists the names, size and other information of each parcel (Table 4.4). Table 4.5 contains the possible location of each parcel based either on the name itself

¹⁴¹ Rogerson *et al*, 38

¹⁴² Medlar, M., *Land Ownership and Land Use in South West Norfolk c 1625 - c 1840*, Unpublished MA thesis, UEA, (2001), 23, 24

¹⁴³ Norwich Cathedral Charters II, doc 36

¹⁴⁴ NRO LEST/IB 88, 35, 75

¹⁴⁵ NRO LEST/IC 58

Table 4.4: Parcels of Land of Richard de Stanford as described in the Charter

No	Acres	Name of Location	Other Information
1	1	Chervelhowe	
2	2.5	Dunes	
3	2.5	Dunes	
4	7	Crowehowewong	
5	0.675		next to east headland of aforesaid 7a
6	14	Kembaldescroft	next to way from Heacham to Ringstead
7	4		next to west headland of aforesaid 14a, north headland abuts on aforesaid way
8	5		In aforesaid piece east headland abutts way from Sedgeford to Ringstead
9	5		Lying next to aforesaid way to east, north headland abuts aforesaid 5a
10	3		Lying in aforesaid piece
11	2	Redhil	
12	5.5	Miklehowedel	
13	2.5	Miklehowedel	
14	4	Baraldeswong	
15	1		next west headland of aforesaid 4a
16	1.25	Blakelondhevedlond	
17	1.25	Maynereslond	
18	2.25	Siwenescrendel	
19	3.5	Longeland	
20	1		No indication where
21	0.5	Maynereselond	
22	0.125	Trusseгоре ¹⁴⁶	

Table 4.5: Location of Parcels of Land of Richard de Stanford

NCC doc 36		Possible names and locations			
No	Name of parcel	LEST/ IB 88	Prec	LEST/ IC 58	Prec./quar
1	Chervelhowe			Charvilhowe	1/21
2	Dunes	Downes	1	Downs...?	1/20
6	Kembaldescroft	Kembald?pre, Kembaldwong	1	Kembaldsperer	1/2 & 3
11	Redhil	Redhill	7	Redhill	7/26
12	Miklehowedel	Michelhowe	2	Micklehow	2/11
14	Baraldeswong			Barlswong	2/17
16	Blakelondhevedlond			Blackland Blackhirn	3/11 4/19
17	Maynereslond	Mainorslond	3	Meyners land	3/6
19	Longeland	Longland		Longland	4/6 & 11
4	Crowehowewong			No apparent alternative	
18	Siwenescrendel	No apparent alternative		No apparent alternative	
21	Trusseгоре				

¹⁴⁶ Described as “*dimidia roda vocatur Trusseгоре*”

where it appears to have continued in use or a possible match for the name as it was in 1275; though it has not been possible to locate all the parcels.

Assuming that the suggested locations in table 4.5 are correct, Fig 4.2 represents the distribution of those parcels of land on a map of Sedgeford of 1631.¹⁴⁷ The largest group of parcels is that associated with Kembaldscroft - 5 in total, covering 31 acres. The shift in names from croft to other suffixes could indicate that it is not the right location – particularly given its comparative distance from the township. However, the references to the roads from Heacham and Sedgeford to Ringsted, which is to the north of Sedgeford, indicate that the location is correct given that on the map of 1631, the road from Heacham bisects the second *quarentena* and the one from Sedgeford lies to the east of the second and third *quarentenae*. The lands of Richard de Stanford are scattered in four *quarentenae* on the north side of the river; the one exception being Redhill which lies on the south side. The majority of the land is (based on the 1631 map) infield but of the c.70 acres, 44% is breck or outfield and forms a single block of land in the north-east corner of the township.

¹⁴⁷ NRO LEST/OC 1



Fig 4.2: Possible Location of Holdings of Richard de Stanford in northern part of Sedgeford in 1275

5. SNETTISHAM

This section will examine, in greater detail, the inter-relationship of the tenures and distribution of the landholdings in Snettisham, the source for which is a field survey of 1591 - all references to which are from a nineteenth-century transcription. The survey refers to two fields: Swetefield and Eastfield. The location of the individual furlongs, however, is not always clear, and there are, in the case of both fields, a number of furlongs which cannot be located from the description. Several of these appear (indistinctly) on a map of 1625, lying to the north-west of the settlement.¹⁴⁸ Others are described as abutting on Heacham field, and another as lying with Dunstall common to the west, the common being to the east of the coastal marshes; and three of the furlongs include 'Horsewell' in their name which was an area to the east of Dunstall common.¹⁴⁹ For the purposes of analysis I have named this group of furlongs 'north furlongs', though that appellation is not used in the survey and some are probably contiguous with Swetefield.¹⁵⁰ Finally, the boundary between Swetefield and Eastfield appears arbitrary: the obvious boundary - Maydestry Way – is followed at the northern and southern ends, but for a third or more of its length in the middle section it zigzags around the furlongs (Fig 4.3).¹⁵¹

5.1 Manorial Landholding

The lands of the individual manors within most Norfolk vills were often intermingled, and the holdings of those at Snettisham, as they appeared in 1591, are summarised in Tables 4.6 and 4.7. The data in the tables is extracted from the listings of lands in Swetefield and Eastfield and does not include any tenements, closes and similar properties, or several marshes.¹⁵² Snettisham manor, not unexpectedly as the capital manor, is significantly larger than the others, in both the number of parcels of land and acreage. It is more complex in the range of tenures by which land is held, and had a significantly higher proportion of lands held in bond tenure than the other manors. Snettisham also has far fewer lands where the nature of the tenure is unknown (7%), compared to the other manors in Table 4.6 where the 'unknowns' are 15 to 34%. This may be a consequence of being the capital manor, or perhaps, given that it was in royal hands, under more diligent administration.

¹⁴⁸ NRO LEST/OB4/1

¹⁴⁹ NRO LEST Q32, 66.4, 67.5, 66.4, 67.5, 67.12 71.8; LEST OB4/1

¹⁵⁰ NRO LEST Q 32, 2 – 46, 47-69

¹⁵¹ Watt, G., *Open Field and Enclosure: The Origins and Disappearance of Open Fields in Snettisham*, Unpublished MA thesis, UEA, (2002), 27

¹⁵² NRO LEST Q 32, 2-46, 47 - 69

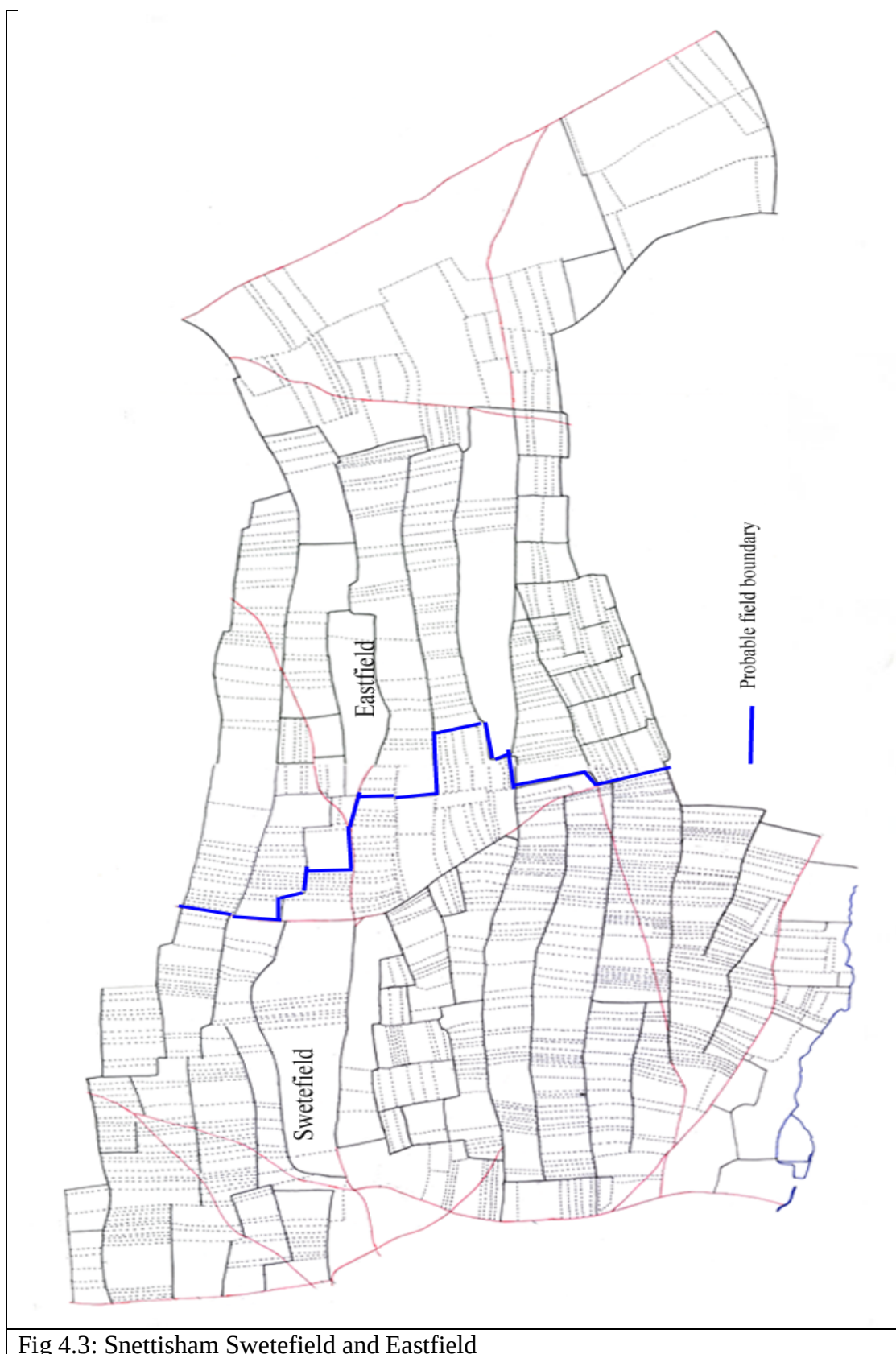


Fig 4.3: Snettisham Swetefield and Eastfield

The small numbers in Table 4.7 may be indicative of the size of those manors; but it could also be that, in the case of Downes and Hakons, the data may represent only part of the former holdings and, interestingly, along with St Johns, it is the freeholdings that have survived in the record – the holders of such lands presumably having more to protect or more secure records. There were also 155 parcels of land with no record as to which manor they were held of. The blank entries are a persistent theme and Campbell noted, with regard to the compilation of sixteenth-century surveys at Aylsham and Gimingham, the difficulties the surveyors had in completing their work. Interestingly the ‘excuse’ given at both was that the lands of different lords were intermingled.¹⁵³ One might also imagine that such surveys presented tenants with an opportunity to lessen their burden, especially where one manor had been absorbed by another, or as a consequence of the dissolution of the monasteries.

Table 4.6: Individual Manorial Holdings by Size and Tenure of the Larger Manors

TENURE	Snettisham		Ingoldisthorpe		Wymondham		Rustyns		Sharnborne	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
Freely	366	64	120	63	38	44	44	73	32	76
Freely by deed	14	2.5								
Copyhold	15	2.5	3	2	4	5	2	3.5		
Bond tenure	106	19	8	4	8	9	5	8.5	1	2.5
Leasehold	28	5			6	7				
Other	3	0.5			1	1			1	2.5
Blank	39	6.5	59	31	30	34	9	15	8	19
Total	571	100	190	100	87	100	60	100	42	100
Acres	1309		402		257		141		58	

Table 4.7: Individual Manorial Holdings by Size and Tenure of the Small Manors

TENURE	Downes	St Johns	Priory of Lewes	Heacham	Hakons
Freely	17	8	1	1	3
Bond tenure					1
Blank			6	3	1
Total	17	8	7	4	5
Acres	39	11	9	5	4

The distribution of the individual manorial holdings has also been mapped (Fig 4.4). The manors included are as in the tables above – with St Johns, Heacham, Lewes Priory and Hakons grouped as ‘others’. Whilst Snettisham holds a significant proportion of the lands there does

¹⁵³ Campbell, *Extent and Layout of Common Fields*, 14

not appear to be a concentration of holdings by an individual manor in any one area, the individual parcels being scattered across the fields. This map whilst it illustrates the complexity of landholding in the vill, was historic; for by 1625 all the manors except Ingoldisthorpe were part of Snettisham manor.¹⁵⁴

5.2. Individual Land Holdings in 1591

This section contains an analysis, by tenant, number, acreage, distribution and tenure, of the arable lands in the open fields of the township; and includes only those holdings that were greater than 30 acres. The analysis is by both size and number to draw out any differences that there might be in the two, given that a scatter of parcels, irrespective of size, is a more complex arrangement for the individual holder to work. There were also 75 smallholders with less than thirty acres, 59 of whom held less than five acres.

The first analysis (table 4.8) is an overview of the holdings by each tenant in the three areas: Swetefield, Eastfield and the “north furlongs”; the acreages of which were: Swetefield 1095, Eastfield 1288 and north furlongs 455 acres. I will, in the next chapter, argue that Eastfield had been predominantly outfield, but at this point consider it alongside the other two ‘fields’. The results can be divided into three groups. Firstly, there are three major landholders with over 400 acres each, but the nature of those holdings is significantly different. Both John Cremer’s and Martin Cobbe’s holdings give the appearance of a piecemeal accumulation with, respectively, 614 acres in 375 separate parcels (an average size of less than 2 acres) and 405 acres in 147 parcels (average of less than 3 acres). Cary’s holding, however, a significant proportion of which was leased demesne, is in 71 parcels – an average of nearly 8 acres and nearly three-quarters is in Eastfield. The second group comprises two holdings of approximately 150 acres; and the third those with thirty to ninety acres. The great majority of tenants had lands in both areas of infield arable (Swetefield and the north furlongs), and whilst the individual holdings are not evenly divided between the two, the comparative sizes of the two areas should be borne in mind.

¹⁵⁴ Blomefield, 8, 460-462

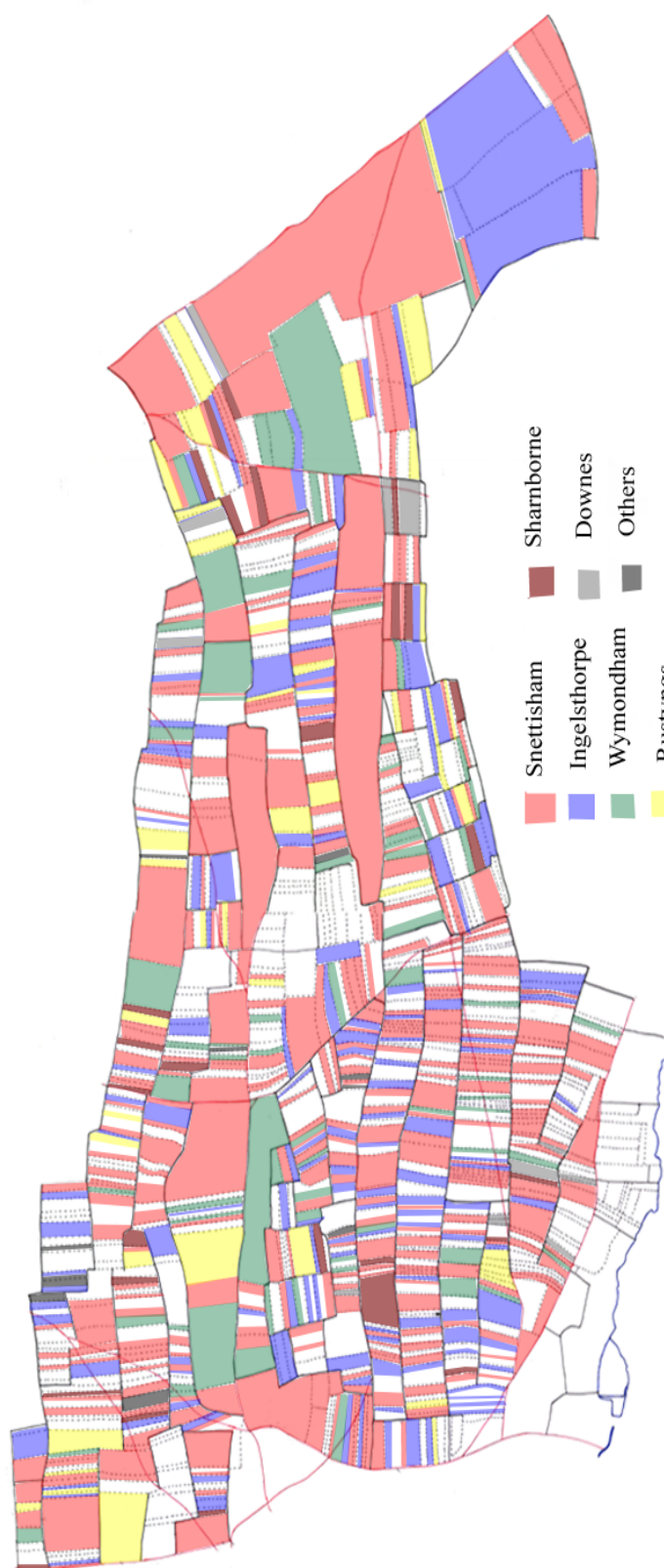


Fig 4.4: Manorial Holdings in Swetefield and Eastfield at Snettisham

Table 4.8: Holdings of Individual Tenants (acres)

TENANT	SWETEFIELD	EASTFIELD	NORTH FURLONGS	TOTAL
Wymond Cary	68	450	96	614
John Cremer	253	173	115	541
Martin Cobbe	131	273	1	405
Heirs of C. Sherborne	75	50	41	166
Townsmen of Kings Lynn	92	54	13	159
Walter Harrydance	64	20	6	90
Martin Cooke	62	16		78
John Rogerson	40	5	15	60
Thomas Bannyard	15		41	56
John Abburowe	41	7	7	55
Thomas Cremer	39	0.5	11	50.5
John Allyson	23	18	2	43
Margaret Everarde	30	10		40
John Wraske	26	4	4	34
John Andeley	19	11	3	33
Lancelot Smallpiece		32		32
Thomas Wraske	12	18	1	31

Table 4.9: Holdings of Individual Tenants (acres & parcels)

TENANT	SWETEFIELD acres/parcels	NORTH FURLONGS acres/parcels	TOTALS acres/parcels
Wymond Cary	68/22	96/27	164/49
John Cremer	253/188	115/74	368/262
Martin Cobbe	131/84	1/1	132/85
Heirs of C. Sherborne	75/43	41/19	116/62
Townsmen of Kings Lynn	92/52	13/8	105/60
Walter Harrydance	64/20	6/7	70/27
Martin Cooke	62/41		62/41
John Rogerson	40/37	15/13	55/50
Thomas Bannyard	15/11	41/20	56/31
John Abburowe	41/31	7/6	48/37
Thomas Cremer	39/29	11/8	50/37
John Allyson	23/13	2/2	25/15
Margaret Everarde	30/21		30/21
John Wraske	26/12	4/3	30/15
John Andeley	19/21	3/3	22/24
Thomas Wraske	12/15	1/1	13/16

5.3 Holdings of The Smaller Landholders

In examining the spatial distribution of the holdings I will focus on the smaller landholders - those with thirty to ninety acres in Table 4.9. This group being a more representative sample, given that it may be misleading to include the larger holdings where the likely impact of acquisition and accumulation by such holders and inheritors is greater.

The lands of the majority of this group (Cooke, Everarde, Abburowe, Thomas Cremer, Rogerson, John Wraske) were predominantly in Swetefield, and Bannyard has a similar concentration to the north of the settlement. The holdings of Harrydance, Allyson and Thomas Wraske however are more evenly split between the three locations. Mapping the distribution of holdings of all this group of tenants with thirty to ninety acres (Fig 4.5) demonstrates that the majority of holdings of those individuals are in isolated strips across a number of furlongs. The principal exceptions are Harrydance who has two adjacent blocks of 30 and 15 acres, together with a number of scattered strips; to a lesser extent Martin Cooke who had a number of larger blocks of land and Everarde who's holding is in three adjacent furlongs. As a group their holdings tend to be concentrated in a number of furlongs in Swetefield to the south and to a lesser extent in the north. The holdings of this group in the outfield (Eastfield) are smaller in number and scattered.

The pattern of individual arable holdings at Snettisham, as in a number of other locations in west Norfolk, was a scattered one rather than clustering, a pattern that is concomitant with the settlements being loosely nucleated. There is, however, no evidence of the regularity encountered in the fields of the 'Midland' system with their regular sequence of holdings, repeated in each furlong.



Fig 4.5: Distribution of Holdings of Individuals holding 30-90 acres in Swetefield & Eastfield

6. CAMBRIDGESHIRE SETTLEMENT AND FIELD SYSTEMS

The foldcourse was also a feature of the agricultural regime of south-east Cambridgeshire, although at the edge of its range; and in rather different circumstances (pp 229-234). The three themes of this chapter (tenurial structures, settlement and field systems) displayed a number of significant differences in south-east Cambridgeshire compared to the other regions discussed above.

Cambridgeshire was by 1086, more manorialised than Norfolk or Suffolk with the east of the county being “as highly manorialised as parts of old Wessex”.¹⁵⁵ The villis of this part of the county were not in general in single hands, though there were exceptions such as Chippenham and Snailwell.¹⁵⁶ More typical were villis such as Thriplow, with three estates in Domesday. The Abbot of Ely had one of 6½ hides, Hardwin who held one hide of the Abbot, and Geoffrey de Mandeville with an estate of 1½ hides. At Duxford there were five estates, totalling 20 hides; whilst at Fowlmere there were two estates.¹⁵⁷ A more important comparison with Norfolk and Suffolk and a further indication of the strength of manorialisation that the county underwent was the severe reduction in the numbers of sokemen. There were between 800 and 900 in 1066, but by 1086 there were only 176; providing, as Maitland wrote of the county, the most convincing evidence of the depression of the peasantry and that “the freer sorts... have been... thrust down”.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁵ Palmer, J. J. N., ‘The Domesday Manor’ in ed Holt, J. C., *Domesday Studies*, Woodbridge, (1987), 149

¹⁵⁶ Palmer, 149

¹⁵⁷ Alecto Domesday Book, f 191, 194, 196, 196v, 197, 197v, 199

¹⁵⁸ Maitland, 63

Settlement

Taylor has characterised south-east Cambridgeshire and north-east Essex as a “frontier zone” with regard to settlement.¹⁵⁹ This zone lay between Roberts and Wrathnell’s East Midland area of the “Central Province”, with its concentration of nucleated settlement, and the Anglia subdivision of the South Eastern province, characterised by a pattern of dispersed settlements.¹⁶⁰ All three authors also identify the ‘Saffron Walden salient’, along the valley of the River Cam, as an area of nucleated settlement.¹⁶¹ The development of nucleated settlements however succeeded a more dispersed pattern similar to that in Norfolk and Suffolk with, in some villis, the settlement being dispersed around greens or moors - for example at Pampisford, Thriplow and Hinxton.¹⁶² Such settlements were subsequently re-arranged into a nucleated pattern, creating at Hinxton for example “the most perfectly regular layout of any village in Cambridgeshire”.¹⁶³ Taylor cautiously suggests that at Hinxton and Pampisford the date of such probably planned settlement development is post-conquest.¹⁶⁴ Furthermore, at Bassingbourn and Barrington, two nearby parishes to the west, a similar chronology has been proposed for the creation of common fields and settlement nucleation, within the overall development of manorial control.¹⁶⁵ The suggestion that, at Bassingbourn and Barrington, settlement nucleation and the development of the open fields were coincident is perhaps exceptional. Most of the parishes in south-east Cambridgeshire had open fields by 1300 (see next section) but this is 200 years later than Taylor’s tentative dating of nucleation at Hinxton and Pampisford. Settlement nucleation is probably a once-only rearrangement, whatever the subsequent increase in complexity; whereas the development of an open-field system could be a cumulative process involving numbers of irregular fields, the incorporation of assarts and imposition of cropping regimes – as in parts of Cambridgeshire.¹⁶⁶ However, a re-arrangement of the field system could also be a one-off change, as at Dry Drayton where, in the 1150s, “five manorial lords agreed on a new partition of the...field land and meadow”; a change that was felt to be “exceedingly necessary” because of the dispersion of the land. Fox suggests that the reason for this major re-arrangement was not the intermixing of each manor’s arable lands, but may be a need to improve grazing and the manuring of the lands.¹⁶⁷

¹⁵⁹ Taylor, ‘Nucleated settlement: a view from the frontier’, *Landscape History*, 24, (2002), 53

¹⁶⁰ Roberts, Wrathnell., *Atlas of Rural Settlement*, fig 1, 45, 40

¹⁶¹ Taylor, *Nucleated Settlement*, 53, 54 fig. 1

¹⁶² *Ibid*, 67, 57, 63, 64

¹⁶³ *Ibid*, 55

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid*, 57, 58

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid*, 69

¹⁶⁶ Postgate, *Field Systems*, 296

¹⁶⁷ Fox, *Adoption of the Midland System*, 95

The Fields of South-East Cambridgeshire

The open fields of south-east Cambridgeshire, in the thirteenth century, had holdings spread across numerous small divisions (called *campi*) which were of a similar size to furlongs in the ‘mature’ field systems further to the west and north of the county.¹⁶⁸ The *campi* were later amalgamated into more ‘conventional’ open fields.¹⁶⁹ This could be an uneven process; for example at Balsham one field of 177 acres was three times the size of the next largest, and such activities can be the result of ‘later re-modelling’ as for example at Fen Ditton where the eleven fields of 1251 were reduced to three in 1357.¹⁷⁰ However, during the thirteenth century an open-field landscape, physically similar to the Midland system, developed in many places.¹⁷¹

At Duxford the arable was, by 1300, divided into three fields of similar sizes (1155, 1115 and 915 acres), and remained unchanged until enclosure in 1830; a situation that was repeated at Thriplow where the three open fields of the thirteenth century were apparently unchanged in 1846.¹⁷² In the early seventeenth century Fowlmere had three open fields, Westfield of 440 acres, North field 245 acres and South field 775 acres; the last may, however, have included heathland and was sometimes divided into Heath and Waterdrain fields.¹⁷³ At enclosure Fowlmere had four open fields.¹⁷⁴ The enclosure map of Hinxton shows five fields of varying sizes, an arrangement that does not appear to have changed significantly since 1332 when there were also at least five fields.¹⁷⁵

The individual holdings within the open fields are also akin to the Midland system, being scattered evenly across the open fields; the majority of holdings remaining largely unchanged in average size and distribution from the thirteenth century until Parliamentary enclosure. Similarly, the holdings of Cambridge colleges that were leased remained unchanged from acquisition.¹⁷⁶ At Thriplow, in 1780, 25 of the 28 landowners held land in all three fields and

¹⁶⁸ Postgate PhD, 14

¹⁶⁹ Postgate PhD 15

¹⁷⁰ Postgate, *Field Systems*, 295; Williamson, *Medieval Landscapes*, 80

¹⁷¹ Postgate PhD, 26

¹⁷² Wright, A., ‘Duxford’, in Wright A ed. *VCH Cambridgeshire*, 6, Oxford, (1978), 210; CRO Q/RDz 10; Q/RDc/65 map

¹⁷³ Keeling, S., ‘Fowlmere’ in Wright, A ed. *VCH, Cambridgeshire*, 8, Oxford, (1982), 159

¹⁷⁴ CRO Q/RDc 70

¹⁷⁵ CRO Q/RDc 47; Rosen, A., ‘Hinxton’, in Wright ed. *VCH, Cambridgeshire*, 6, 225

¹⁷⁶ Postgate PhD, 174, 175, 172

three quarters of the strips were of 1 acre or less; and the holdings of Crishall Grange in Duxford in the seventeenth century were dispersed across all three of the parish's open fields.¹⁷⁷

The holdings of small landholders show a similar dispersion. At Thriplow, a late seventeenth-century terrier of 18½ acres of copyhold lands lists eight parcels in Church field and seven each in West and Heath fields.¹⁷⁸ The situation was similar, in 1684, at Snailwell on the chalk escarpment as the following table shows. The fact that Westons field had not been enclosed is perhaps a tribute to the survival of the open fields in Cambridgeshire.

Table 4.10: Distribution of Holdings (acres) across the Five Fields in Snailwell¹⁷⁹

	Field				
	Newmarket	Bury	Small	North	Westons
Field size (acres)	392	423	232	266	43
Manorial lands					
Demesne	17	25	16	10	
T Branch	82	88	58	26	6
Fison	75	68	36	54	10
Howson	44	47	27	33	7
Hinson	6	6	1	6	
Other Holders					
Warren	93	105	53	86	13
E Branch	26	26	12	23	2
Warren	21	29	12	20	2
Brands	3	4	2	0.75	0.25
Parson	22	26	16	9	4

The foldcourse in south-east Cambridgeshire thus co-existed alongside - and by contrast to other regions of East Anglia - a pattern of nucleated settlement surrounded by large open fields – often three in number – giving the physical impression of a Midland system.

¹⁷⁷ Wittering S, *Enclosure in South Cambridgeshire: Society, Farming and the Environment*, Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of East Anglia (2008), Appendix 3; Taylor, C., 'Crishall Grange, Fowlmere: A Settlement in Eight Landscapes', *Proc of the Cambridge Antiquarian Society* XCIV, (2005), 138

¹⁷⁸ CRO 413/T5

¹⁷⁹ CRO R/55/7/43/4

7. PASTURE, HEATH AND MARSH

These areas were normally common land, the resources of which were available (often with a stint on animal numbers) to all who had common rights. They are separate from the nature of the field system and in practice encompassed just about any scrap of land that was not either several or under the plough. Within the Midland system pasturage rights resided in the whole township and were exploited by all the landholders of the vill; and was, according to Fox, “a system founded upon a shortage of pasture”, given that both grazing and crop production were integrated on the same ground.¹⁸⁰ Williamson *et al* have, however, challenged the idea that there was “a crisis of pasture” in the medieval period, demonstrating that the area of land cropped each year was similar to the woodland areas to the east in Essex or Suffolk.¹⁸¹ Extensive heath or downs were a key component of sheep-corn husbandry wherever it was employed; but in East Anglia, it was Gray’s view that pasturing was based on rights over defined pastures and parts of the common fields which had often, by the sixteenth century, formed a ‘foldcourse’.¹⁸²

For those areas with a pattern of clustered holdings and dispersed settlement, such as east Norfolk, Campbell makes the point that large-scale sheep farming was restricted to those places close to extensive marshes or heath for grazing, and that in many places the common fields extended to the parish boundary, merging with those of other parishes, thus limiting the amount of pasture.¹⁸³ At Coltishall a survey of 1584 recorded only 10 acres of common pasture and whilst other pieces of common are recorded the maximum can have been no more than 50 acres in a parish of 1190 acres.¹⁸⁴ By contrast, late sixteenth-century maps of Cawston and Horstead and Staninghall, all in the same area, but which were on the lighter, poorer soils, had significant areas of heathland pasture.¹⁸⁵ Cawston also had a foldcourse – indicating some degree of necessary communal arrangements such as regulated cropping – and would certainly fit in Martin and Satchells type 2a. In terms of the pattern of settlement, the maps indicate that both villages had a relatively dispersed pattern at this date.

¹⁸⁰ Gray, 326; Fox, *Ecological Dimensions*, 124, 127

¹⁸¹ Williamson *et al*, 120

¹⁸² Gray, 326

¹⁸³ Campbell, *Extent and Layout of Common Fields*, 24

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid*, 10

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid*, fig 1 & 4.

In East Anglian townships with more than one manor, disagreements over commons and the rights thereto must have been perennial. Birtles argues that the decisions with regard to common rights, particularly in areas of inter-commoning, and who should have the use of them were resolved by the manor which had the greatest influence and “more sway over shared resources”; but the lords of different manors could also come to an agreement, such as that between Whissonsett and Horningtoft, in 1270, over the extent of their commons; or at Aldeby, in 1310, over extracting marl from the great common.¹⁸⁶

Foldcourse boundaries could be physically defined on the ground – as at Brandon and Elveden where they were marked out by stones and dykes respectively; but arguments about doles or other markers being moved indicate that such areas were not always defined.¹⁸⁷ Even if defined by custom, arguments in the sixteenth and seventeenth century would suggest that such customs were ignored – deliberately or otherwise. The areas within a foldcourse were not the only available grazing: an agreement over the ploughing up of the warren and commons between John Hare and the tenants in Hilborough in 1635, makes reference to “common and green before their [the tenants] houses and the little plot of ground by the church where the cross stood with the camping leys” as not being part of the new arrangements.¹⁸⁸

The degree to which the available grazing was several to the manorial lord was highly localised, and ‘common’ and ‘several’ were, rather than distinct categories, often a gradation of customs and rights. At Lakenheath Warren for example there was a common right “of mowing the breakes or fearnes” after August 29th, but at Brandon the right was without restriction.¹⁸⁹ Rackham suggests that grazing on Lakenheath Warren was a common right.¹⁹⁰ However, Crompton and Sheail do not describe it as such and one would assume that the lord (the Bishop of Ely in this case) having gone to the trouble of embanking his warren would ‘control’ if not retain the grazing there.¹⁹¹ A similar mixture of common and several rights, were active elsewhere in Breckland. At Bridgham common grazing was restricted to 260 acres of heath whilst other rights over that area of heath were several to the Bishop of Ely, whilst on other areas of heath elsewhere in the same vill, commoners and the Bishop had equal rights. At

¹⁸⁶ Birtles, 51, 52, 57, 58

¹⁸⁷ Bailey, *Marginal Economy*, 69

¹⁸⁸ NRO HIL 3/16/1

¹⁸⁹ Crompton, G., Sheail, J., ‘The Historical Ecology of Lakenheath Warren: A Case Study’ *Biological Conservation*, 8, (1975), 308 Bailey, *Marginal Economy*, 55

¹⁹⁰ Rackham, O., *The History of the Countryside*, London, (1995), 293

¹⁹¹ *Ibid*, 292

Ingham (Suffolk) the lord held heathland in severalty, though transgressions here and elsewhere were frequent; Bailey suggesting that at some places fines were in effect “thinly disguised licences to graze”.¹⁹²

At Holkham, the heath – *communis bruera* or *le lyng* - lay to the east of the open fields but parts of it were held in severalty. In 1529 there were 29 parcels of land in the lyng held by the various manors – the largest of 14 acres. I wonder if some of these were areas of whinne grounds to provide shelter for the flocks in winter.¹⁹³ Similar localised arrangements were evident at East Wretham where an eighteenth-century terrier describes two sheepwalks: one on Ringmere heath that was common from the 1st August to the 1st November; and another, Lodge heath that was common for great cattle all the year. There were also two sets of brecks that were similarly distinguished: one again being common from the 1st August to the 1st of November except when sown with corn; the second set being always common and subject to the same exception.¹⁹⁴ In contrast, in neighbouring West Wretham an account of lands belonging to Kings College included 1040 acres of heath in two parcels – presumably all several.¹⁹⁵ At Feltwell in 1622 a document was drawn up defining the boundaries of the town’s sheepwalks, the heath being subdivided between four flocks.¹⁹⁶

The pressure on grazing increased with the advent of the ‘flockmasters’ and, more generally with the growth in sheep numbers. At Langham in 1593, Nathaniel Bacon agreed with the tenants that, in order “to avoid over-stocking 160 acres of common” the common would be divided. He was to hold part in severalty which he would fence off from the rest of the common with quickset hedges; whilst the tenants had right of common over the remainder.¹⁹⁷

By contrast, Miles Corbett, lord of the manor of Woodbastwick and Laviles, in order to increase the feed for his flock, was accused of taking in part of Mousehold heath by moving the boundary to his benefit.¹⁹⁸ At Snettisham, the survey of 1591 sets out a complex picture of rights and ownership over the marshes and commons of the township which lay to the east of the settlement and bordering the sea. Firstly, there were a number of “free pasturages”, held in severalty by various manors. The major portion was held by the Duchy manor: Northcote and

¹⁹² Bailey, *Marginal Economy*, 55

¹⁹³ Hassell, *Beauroy*, 546

¹⁹⁴ NRO MS 10071

¹⁹⁵ NRO MS 18019, 41 C 7

¹⁹⁶ NRO MC 2411/1/22, 968X5

¹⁹⁷ Hassell-Smith *et al*, *Bacon Papers*, III, 256

¹⁹⁸ Whyte, *Perceptions of the Norfolk Landscape*, 256

Southcote (or Westmarsh) were exclusive to the Duchy manor and provided free pasturage for 400 sheep in the former and 500 in the latter. The same manor had free pasturage for a further 600 sheep in Middlecote – 200 of which appertained to the former manor of Hakons. It shared Middlecote with Wymond Cary who, in right of Rustens manor held free pasturage for 200 head. There was a further area set aside for feeding the sheep described as “free pasturage within the liberty of the course of foldage called Southey”. This was for 600 sheep, divided equally between the manors of Ingoldisthorpe Hall and Dame Cicelies, and the rectory of Snettisham. Finally, Ann Sherborne held in Snettisham and Ingoldisthorpe “in right of their course of foldage called Burnham Marsh the free pasturage of 400 sheep”. The survey also includes a summary of the “Common Wastes and Marshes” (Table 4.11).¹⁹⁹ As can be seen, a number are clearly several (bold in table) such as Southey and Northey marshes but the acreages are small. Whilst Moor Green - 740 acres in extent - is common, and the status of Dunstall common and Stefen marsh appears unambiguous. However, eight of the marshes are claimed as being common whilst being parcels of one of the pasturages discussed above. That the survey describes them as ‘common’ would suggest that in theory at least the inhabitants – most likely those with common rights - had the right of pasturing that they claimed. The examples from Snettisham, and elsewhere, demonstrate a complex interplay of rights, both common and severalty, and often over nominally the same areas.

¹⁹⁹ LEST/Q 32, 70, 71

Table 4.11: Snettisham Common Wastes and Marshes

		COMMON WASTES & MARSHES	ACRES
1	Moor Green	Inhabitants have free pasture for all their cattle without stint or limitation & farmers of manor do not depasture their herds within same except [when] empty & in winter	740
2	East Marsh	Pasture for 600 sheep	400 acres +
3	Southey hill marsh	Cobbe holds	60a
4	Southey marsh	C Sherborne holds	35a
5	Northey marsh	Formerly Abbot of Wymondham	34a
6	West marsh etc	Farmers of Southey flock course have pasture, inhabitants claim common of pasture	540a
7	Southcote marsh	Demesne of manor several to southcote flock	160a
8	Stathe marsh	Parcel of course of southcote flock and inhabitants claim common of pasture	130a
9	Sparrow marsh	Parcel of course of middlecote flock and inhabitants claim common of pasture	120a
10	Hookthorn common – marsh; & Wonge marsh	Parcel of course of southcote & middlecote flocks and inhabitants claim common of pasture	220a
11	Blackrose marsh	W Cary holds	50a
1	Starflete marsh	Lib of feeding 200 sheep, inhabitants claim common of pasture	80a
2	Grenemarsh	Parcel of middlecotecourse & common for the inhabitants they claim	240a
3	Priests marsh	W Cary, lib of course for sheep	100a
4	Middlecote marsh	Demesne	80a
5	Fresh marsh	Parcel of late Abbot of Wymondham, lib of foldage & course for 300 sheep	80a
6	Northcote marsh	Demesne	120a
7	Dunstall salt marsh	Waste of manor	240a
8	Dunstall common	Pasture of waste, marsh & common are parcel of course of Northcote flock; inhabitants have common of pasture for all their cattle without stint	160a
9	Stefen marsh	Parcel of Northcote inhabitants have liberty of taking rushes and shingle in all common marshes	130a

8. DISCUSSION

The following discussion will focus, initially, on the regulation of the open fields and then draw some conclusions as to what the pre-conditions for the presence or otherwise of a foldcourse were. Finally, I will test those pre-conditions by looking at the anomalous situation of the Sandlings referred to earlier (p. 47).

8.1 Regulation

The foldcourse was clearly found principally in districts in which there were open fields with scattered holdings, and in which the settlements were at least loosely nucleated. In a situation where holdings were clustered, one can imagine that an individual had a number of strips that he could 'allocate' to 'his' crop regime, protecting 'his' fallow with hurdles during periods of grazing or contributing it to the communal arrangements. Such activity would have been very time consuming and labour intensive and one can envisage informal arrangements arising between individuals whose clustered holdings were adjacent. In such a situation the collection of strips might be defined as or form a field, but it was such in name only. Clustered holdings are also usually associated with dispersed settlement, with an individual's arable and messuages being near to each other; in which situation the holders of adjacent strips were also likely to be neighbours.

In a situation where the holdings were more widely distributed in a township's fields, such informal arrangements would be more difficult to maintain - given the greater number of tenants and the increasing complexity - and such an approach would inevitably breakdown. Thus, with the lands of the individual manors that often lay intermingled in the fields, mechanisms had to be developed in order to manage both cropping and grazing. The cropping regime was, in many cases, managed by the 'shift' system, whereby parcels of land were, assuming a three-course rotation, allocated to one of three shifts distributed through the township fields. Similarly, rules governing the post-harvest 'shack' were set communally - but what was the basis of such an organisation?

The manor was not the only institution for organising and managing the life of a village; one alternative was the village community itself but the difficulty is that records of such organisation are "almost entirely" lacking.²⁰⁰ The village community did, however, possess a

²⁰⁰ Campbell, *Manorial Structure*, 226

number of duties including owing suit to the courts of the hundred and the shire, keeping the peace, and the repair of roads and bridges. There was, though, no formal organisation within the vill to carry out these tasks - ‘organisation’ as such was largely custom, supported by the manorial courts, and where the vill and the manor coincided the distinction between the two became “a fine one”.²⁰¹ The role of the village community may have been more significant in communities of absentee lordship, or where the manor and the vill were not co-incident - as was the case in much of East Anglia.²⁰² In Birtle’s view the village community was “the effective unit of cultivation”, especially given the weak manorial control and several manors in one vill would have led to an even greater reliance on the village.²⁰³ The role of the manor court was still, however, important given that it was the only formal means of enforcement; even if that ‘enforcement’ was the definition and support of ‘custom’ which originated with the tenants rather than the lord – the court was thus the nexus between manor and commune.²⁰⁴

But which court in a vill with more than one manor had precedence? There were two types of manorial court: the “normal” manor court which any manorial lord could hold, and which in later periods was called a court baron. This dealt with the administration and the customs of the estate, and ‘offences’ against those customs. There was also the leet court, which was held only by those manors that had ‘view of frankpledge’ and which, though it may have been attended by the same people as the court baron, was held less frequently and was a “discrete and different jurisdiction”. Only some manors could hold a leet court and its role was related to the vill rather than the manor but the differences between the two were inevitably eroded given the probable involvement of the same officials.²⁰⁵ View of frankpledge was a regional system of jurisdiction that was common in eastern, and southern England and the Midlands, the possession of view of frankpledge is therefore, in theory at least, another means of separating out or grading the relative status of a manor in the multi-manorial situation of East Anglia.²⁰⁶ A community rarely had more than one court leet – though Fransham had three – and the manor which held the court leet was often referred to as the capital manor.²⁰⁷ Holkham,

²⁰¹ Miller, E., Hatcher, J., *Medieval England: Rural Society and Economic Change 1086 – 1348*, Harlow, (1978), 102

²⁰² Ibid, 103

²⁰³ Birtles, 49

²⁰⁴ Birtles, 50

²⁰⁵ Bailey, *English Manor*, 178

²⁰⁶ Bailey, *English Manor*, 179

²⁰⁷ Birtles, 51

in 1279, also had two manors with view of frankpledge – one of the fee of Wighton, the other of Burghall.²⁰⁸

A different approach was taken at Sedgeford where Norwich Priory held, from the thirteenth century, two manors. Whilst each manor had their own officials and separate accounts, only one court was held - the tenants of the two manors being mostly identical. Williamson also records in a footnote that the only reference to either manor as separate entity in the surviving court rolls is to a view of frankpledge at Easthall in 1259.²⁰⁹ This may not fit the pattern outlined above as Easthall (or Gnatington) was in 1086 a separate estate, and one that appears to have been subsidiary to the main holding.

There is therefore the ‘formal’ in the guise of the court and the ‘informal’ in that of the vill – which, however, needed a court to impose its will. The alternative is some form of *laissez faire*, which is what Campbell seems to be advancing with regard to Hevingham and more generally east Norfolk. He firmly rejects a role for the village community on a number of grounds – not least that there is no evidence that such existed, and he would challenge whether there was a ‘community’ in the sense implied above. In Hevingham, the manor(s) and vill were not co-incident; there were more people holding land in its fields than lived there, and some who lived there had no land in the vill; the degree of communal management of the agriculture was minimal – being restricted to the post-harvest shack; Hevingham was a dispersed settlement with at least three hamlets (and, therefore, probably with clustered holding of individual strips in the fields). In sum, Hevingham (and elsewhere in the east of the county), had weak communal institutions and an individualistic population able to operate independently.²¹⁰

Whilst some of these qualifications can also be applied to the west of the county (certainly manors and vills were not co-incident, and the degree of manorial complexity was considerable) the greatest single difference between east and west in East Anglia is the question of communal arrangements with regard to the foldcourse and the management of grazing. Campbell himself described the commonfield system within which the foldcourse operated as one where “control...is vested in the seignorial authorities”.²¹¹ However, as Dyer has pointed

²⁰⁸ Hassall, Beauroy, 215, 217

²⁰⁹ Williamson, Norfolk: thirteenth century, 85

²¹⁰ Campbell, Manorial Structure, 251

²¹¹ Campbell, Commonfield Origins, 115

out, with most demesnes being leased by c.1420, lords no longer needed to fulfil a supervisory role.²¹² He suggests that informal meetings, often undocumented, “can be presumed to have existed” and to have dealt with the routine management of the common fields.²¹³

Douglas suggests that, in earlier periods, the vill did become the ‘unit of management’; and that given the lack of coincidence between manor and vill in East Anglia, the administration of agrarian customs in the courts of several manors, each having perhaps only a small share in the common field, “would present insuperable difficulties”. The absence of evidence for such co-operation however means that such assumptions rest largely on probability.²¹⁴ There are, however, some indications that decisions were made that involved the whole vill and, whilst these have nothing to do with foldcourses, they are all in north and west Norfolk. At West Rudham, an agreement was made, in the first half of the twelfth century, between the two manorial lords concerning “the common administration of their jurisdictional rights”. Ingoldisthorpe, was in 1086, held by several lords of “varying superiorities”; at one estate c.1165 held by Binham Priory, a charter was witnessed by “all of the village of Ingoldisthorpe”. A further Binham charter of c. 1125 which gave 10 acres of land to the Priory was also witnessed by “*et omnia villata de Dalling teste*”.²¹⁵ As Douglas comments: Dalling, which was in 1086 held by 4 lords who all lived far away from a vill with 14 freemen, was “within a generation...acting as a unity quite independently of the individual seigneurial rights within it – could it not also regulate its own economic business”; the vill alone was the unit of corporate husbandry and ‘possessing’ the common fields in their entirety.²¹⁶

Overall, whilst retaining some of Campbell’s caution, I would suggest that, in the medieval period, the vill was the source of agreement and ‘management’, much of which took place ‘under the radar’. In addition there is also the question of how much ‘organisation’ was actually required as regards the agrarian arrangements as opposed to jurisdictional issues. One wonders to what extent communal arrangements with regard to shifts and the management of the foldcourse, were, once established, self-perpetuating and thus how often it was necessary for a ‘higher authority’ to intervene and reallocate furlongs or lands to the fallow shift. However,

²¹² Dyer, C., ‘The Political Life of the Fifteenth Century English Village’, in *The Fifteenth Century 4, Political Culture in Medieval Britain*, eds Clark, L., Chapman, C., Woodbridge, (2004), 146

²¹³ Dyer, Political Life, 142

²¹⁴ Douglas, 160

²¹⁵ Douglas, 161, 162, 164, 242

²¹⁶ Douglas, 164, 165

once ‘higher authority’ became interested in the foldcourse the situation changed. Certainly by the late seventeenth century Christopher Calthorpe at Holme was insistent on his right to choose the shepherd (an appointment Dyer saw as beneath the dignity of the manorial court) and to ‘protect’ the integrity of the shift against sowing out of course.²¹⁷ Furthermore, the role of Roger Townshend’s bailiff Skayman discussed in the next chapter was clearly not ‘hands off’. More generally with regard to the foldcourse, as Whyte has suggested by the late sixteenth century “local identities were being forged and re-forged through the need to protect local resources” and rights from lordly encroachment.²¹⁸

8.2 Foldcourse, Fields and Settlements

The foldcourse was a manorial institution – though not all the manors in a township had one – and the possession of a foldcourse can in a number of cases be traced back to Domesday and beyond. The manorial complexity of west Norfolk was comparable, in many cases, to that of the east of the county; and the lands of each manor were intermingled with the lands of other manors.

The settlement pattern of west Norfolk was predominantly one of “poly-focal” or loosely nucleated villages. Martin and Satchell are in “little doubt” that there is a link between common fields and nucleated settlements in the Midlands and suggest that the development of large open fields acted as a brake on the settlement shifts of the Anglo-Saxon period.²¹⁹ They also suggest that there was a similar but reduced impact on East Anglia, the reduction being due to the “relative abundance” of land that was less suited to conversion to arable, such as the heaths.²²⁰ Other factors such as the relative abundance of freemen and sokemen, and the degree to which the open fields were subject to organisation and control in the west of Norfolk and Suffolk, may also have been significant. It is, however, the case that in some places at least the pattern of dispersed clusters in west Norfolk persisted beyond the high point of the expansion of the arable in medieval England.

²¹⁷ Dyer, *Political Life*, 146; NRO LEST/P20, 98

²¹⁸ Whyte, *Perceptions of the Norfolk Landscape*, 223

²¹⁹ Martin & Satchell, 217

²²⁰ Martin & Satchell, 227

The open fields of the western part of Norfolk and Suffolk do display some significant differences to the east of the county. Individual holdings within furlongs are not clustered, but scattered, in an irregular fashion, across many of the furlongs of the vill. It remains the case that the ‘field’ appears to be of limited relevance in the management of the arable lands, though to what extent the shift came to equal a field will be explored in the next chapter.

Finally, there is a paradox with regard to the foldcourse in greater East Anglia: in Norfolk and Suffolk the context was one of loosely nucleated, formerly polyfocal, settlements and scattered arable holdings within furlongs; whilst in south Cambridgeshire it operated within a Midland field system and more conventionally nucleated pattern of settlement. Overall, one should not be too didactic about what the context of the foldcourse was. What therefore were the necessary pre-conditions for a foldcourse?

Firstly, light soils in need of the fold but while the fold was ubiquitous foldcourses were not. Secondly, settlements could be nucleated as in south and east Cambridgeshire, but in most foldcourse townships a loosely nucleated, formerly poly-focal pattern predominated. Thirdly, it is difficult to envisage the fold operating in a zone of small fields and piecemeal enclosure other than on an individualistic basis; open fields were therefore necessary, alongside a settlement pattern that was not dispersed. Finally, there was the tenurial structures that created and maintained the rights by which the foldcourse operated; even if the sixteenth century version had moved a long way from its earlier flexibility and origins.

8.3 Sandlings

One way to test these pre-conditions is to apply them to an area that, on environmental grounds, is ‘foldcourse country’. The Sandlings of east Suffolk is such a region, forming a relatively narrow strip of land extending along the coast from the Orwell estuary to Lowestoft, and is mostly between five and ten kilometres wide, narrowing towards the north. The majority of its townships extended either east to include the coastal alluvium and marshes of the Wallasea 1 association (813f), or west on to the clayland or chalky till of the Hanslope (411d) and Ragdale ((712g) associations; and in some cases in both directions.²²¹ Those townships which included marshland thus had a further grazing resource – as at Walberswick discussed below. However,

²²¹ Map, Soils of England and Wales, Eastern England

the predominant soils through the region are those of the Newport 4 association (551g), together with that of the marginally better Newport 2 association (551e). The former are well-drained, sandy and often acid, whilst the latter consists of deep, well drained and sandy soils.²²² The early seventeenth-century *Chorography of Suffolk* characterised the Sandlings as an area “fitte for sheep and corne”, and the superficially obvious comparison, in environmental terms, is with the Brecklands.²²³ However, it is an area apparently almost devoid of references to foldcourses or freedoms and rights associated with the fold.²²⁴ The following will explore this apparent paradox by examining the contexts of the foldcourse – tenurial, settlement and field systems - as they manifest themselves in the Sandlings, together with an exploration of the agriculture.

Tenurial Structures

Darby suggested that “one of the outstanding features of Suffolk” at Domesday was the large number of freemen - 41% of the recorded population.²²⁵ Additionally, the freemen were located mainly in the east and in those hundreds where the Sandlings principally lie. The freemen and sokemen in 1066, constituted 82% of the recorded population in Wilford, 68% in Colneis, 66% in Plomesgate and 31% in Blything.²²⁶ Most of these hundreds include, to varying degrees, parts of clayland Suffolk; an area characterised as of “diverse manorial structure and many small manors to the vill” and where, in some places, freemen were in the majority.²²⁷ This is equally true of many of the villis in the Sandlings.

The following table is a summary of the Domesday population, in 1086, for ten villis that are predominantly, if not exclusively, part of the Sandlings, in a rough south-north line (as are the hundreds above) and are listed in that order with the most southerly first. Several conclusions can be drawn from these tables: freemen are a significant proportion of the population in all the villis except Blythburgh; where the free tenants are described as sokemen but have bordars attributed to them. This is probably a consequence of the manor being, by 1066, in the hands of the King, and, in the Anglo-Saxon period, the centre of a royal estate.²²⁸ There is also a

²²² Hodge *et al*, 272, 277

²²³ MacCulloch D ed, *The Chorography of Suffolk*, Suffolk Records Society, XIX, Ipswich, (1976), 20

²²⁴ Wade Martins, Williamson, *Roots of Change*, 48

²²⁵ Darby H C, *Domesday Geography of Eastern England*, Cambridge, (1971), 168

²²⁶ Dodwell B, ‘The Free Peasantry of East Anglia in Domesday’ *Norfolk Archaeology*, 27, (1939), 148, 156

²²⁷ Warner P, *Greens, Commons and Clayland Colonization*, Leicester, (1987), 25

²²⁸ Warner P, *The Origins of Suffolk*, Manchester, (1996), 120

distinct north-south pattern, with in the southernmost vills few if any demesne structures or holdings and a division of the lands between greater numbers of tenants in chief, and freemen form the great majority of the population. In the northern vills a more regular pattern of lords and manors is in place but still with significant numbers of freemen.

Table 4.12: Domesday Populations in Some Sandlings Vills in 1086

Vill	Tenants in Chief	Manors	Freemen	Sokemen	Villeins	Bordars	Slaves	Ref ²²⁹
Levington	2		14					f 341, 342v, 406
Bucklesham	2		32			2		f 292, 386v
Sutton	4	5	73			2½		f 293, 317, 317v, 318, 319, 324v, 325, 387, 443
Capel St Andrew	4		36			1		f 293, 318, 319, 343v, 387
Sudbourne	2	2	12		14	21		f 316v, 348, 384
Snape	1	1	46		8	16		f 316
Leiston	1	3	56		27	31	7	f 310, 311, 311v
Westleton	2	2	15½		14	14		f 312, 313v, 314, 440
Blythburgh	1	1		7	17	59	1	f 282
Reydon	1		32		5	20	1	f 414

Overall, the characterisation of loose manorial control and high numbers of freemen can be applied to these vills; and the proliferation of small manors through sub-infeudation continued - for example, at Westleton where, by 1463, 15 lordships had interests in the vill.²³⁰ A similarly complex pattern of lordships was present at Sutton, which also had several ‘lost’ vills.²³¹ More generally in the southern Sandlings there was a great number of named vills that had, later, declined to halls or farms. Such numbers were not simply a reflection of a high population density (Flegg in Norfolk, for example, had a greater population but no ‘lost’ vills); but were also a reflection of the great numbers of freemen who paid taxes in their own right and their location was thus recorded.²³²

There were in the medieval period a number of monastic foundations in the area of the Sandlings for which the surviving charters have been published: the Abbeys of Leiston and Sibton and Butley and Blythburgh Priories. In all four cases, and in comparison to Norfolk and west Suffolk, I have found no references to foldcourses and only a few to freedom or liberty of

²²⁹ Alecto Domesday Book

²³⁰ Warner, *Greens, Commons*, 40

²³¹ Martin, Satchell, 131, 132

²³² Williamson, T., *Sutton Hoo and its Landscape*, Oxford, (2008), 40, 43

fold, none of which occur in the area of the Sandlings. The charters do, however, include references to the agrarian landscape and the management of flocks and are discussed below.

Settlement and Field Systems

Settlement in the medieval and post medieval period was dispersed - at Sutton, for example, a 1629 map shows “predominantly dispersed farmsteads”.²³³ Williamson suggests that the scattered settlements in the Domesday period became more so over time with farms and cottages clustered around greens and commons; similar to the pattern in clayland Suffolk and Norfolk.²³⁴

The Sandlings was an area of open fields, with more than a third of the cultivable land managed in this fashion, and they mostly lay on the slightly better Newport 2 soils; as at Sutton, in 1629, where the arable was divided into 130 ‘furlongs’ of varying size and shape and determined by the pattern of tracks.²³⁵ The predominantly open-field nature of the landscape is indicated by the many charters for parcels of land which are strips in an open field; for example, from Blythburgh mid thirteenth century: “*una pecia terre arabilis*.”²³⁶ The grants are predominantly for small parcels – the Blythburgh cartulary has 51 charters for land in the Sandlings area where the size of the plot is given, of these 15 are for one acre or less, 27 for plots of between one and five acres and five for plots of six to ten acres. The remaining four are for between 18 and 30 acres. In a number of cases the parcels of land are specifically located in a field (*campo*), for example: 20 acres in Westfeld in Blythburgh, in mid-twelfth century.²³⁷ A grant, of before 1228, in Westleton is for a whole field (*toto magno campo*), unfortunately there is no indication of the size of the field.²³⁸ More pertinently, with regard to the foldcourse, was that the individual holdings were not dispersed but clustered; and close to the holders’ tenements, in a pattern similar to Worstead in east Norfolk.²³⁹

²³³ Martin, Satchell, 139

²³⁴ Williamson, Sutton Hoo, 45, fig 17; Warner, Greens, Commons, 45; Wade-Martins, Launditch Hundred, 80

²³⁵ Williamson, Sutton Hoo, 47; Martin, Satchell, 134

²³⁶ Harper-Bill C ed, *Blythburgh Priory Cartulary part 1*, Suffolk Record Society, (1980), doc 15

²³⁷ Ibid, doc 42

²³⁸ Brown p ed, *Sibton Abbey Cartularies and Charters part 2*, Suffolk Record Society, (1985), doc76

²³⁹ Williamson, Sutton Hoo, fig 24; Martin, Satchell, 136, 86

Heathland

The heaths were probably common land in the medieval period but by the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries they were increasingly enclosed and employed as several sheepwalks as at Butley, Bromeswell and Eyke.²⁴⁰ By 1629 at Sutton the heaths in the north of the township, on the poor, sandy Newport 4 soils were predominantly sheepwalk together with a small common.²⁴¹ The piecemeal acquisition of heath is illustrated by a number of grants to Blythburgh and Sibton. The former received, in the latter half of the twelfth century, a heath called *Hulsatu*, and further grants of a similar date include: “*totum brueriam quam habeo in Blybur*”.²⁴² There were in addition grants of heath in Henham of “*tres acras de bruera*”, held by a tenant; and “*totam bruerium nostrum*”.²⁴³ Sibton Abbey received, in Westleton c.1240, “*duas pecias bruerie*” described as lying between portions of heath held by the Abbey and three other lay landholders; and in Wenhaston c.1230, a grant of a parcel of heath, again lying on one side next to that of the Abbey, and a further grant of all the grantor’s rights in the heathlands of the township.²⁴⁴

Agriculture

Martin and Satchell suggest that at Sutton there is no evidence for an “overall communal system” of agrarian organisation.²⁴⁵ The region was also an area of infield-outfield cultivation, in what Williamson describes as “sporadic cultivation”.²⁴⁶ Whilst brecking probably never achieved the regularity of the Brecklands or north-west Norfolk, it was of some antiquity. Sibton Abbey was granted, c.1250, pasture for 240 sheep on the heath at Nacton, which included the provision that the animals may not graze on land that is newly broken into cultivation or afterwards converted; and at Westleton in 1240 there was a grant of a parcel of arable together with heath in Southfield.²⁴⁷ Similarly at Leiston, an inquisition into the acquisition by Leiston abbey of the manor of Wade Hall recorded that there was 125 acres in the common field but this was so sandy that it could only be profitably sown “twice in ten years”.²⁴⁸ Warner describes a similar system in operation in Walberswick in the seventeenth

²⁴⁰ Williamson, Sutton Hoo, 53; Martin, Satchell, 136

²⁴¹ Martin, Satchell, 136

²⁴² Harper-Bill, Blythburgh Cartulary 1, doc 42, doc 39

²⁴³ Harper-Bill C ed, *Blythburgh Priory Cartulary part 2*, Suffolk Record Society, (1981), docs 291, doc 319

²⁴⁴ Brown, Sibton Abbey 2, docs 93, 330, 313

²⁴⁵ Martin, Satchell, 136

²⁴⁶ Martin, Satchell, 134, 136; Williamson, Sutton Hoo, 58

²⁴⁷ Brown, Sibton Abbey 2, doc 265, 91

²⁴⁸ Mortimer R H ed, *The Cartulary of Leiston Abbey and Butley Priory Charters*, doc 114

century whereby the flock was grazed on the lower meadows and folded at night on the upland pasture in order to enrich the latter for periodic cultivation of barley.²⁴⁹ This is, in some ways, a reverse of the normal foldcourse mechanism of heathland pasture and arable folding but is taking advantage of the available meadow and saltmarsh of the township. In the documents related to the disputes over common rights and enclosure at Walberswick, the manorial lord claimed that “that the lordes of the said manors or their farmers have used to plow such part of the said heath as they would...And that it appears by the rigges and furrowes on most parte of the heath that the same have usually byn plowed”.²⁵⁰

Folds and Foldcourses

The first documentary evidence for the role of sheep in the agriculture of the region comes from Domesday. Darby’s map of the distribution of sheep in Suffolk in 1086 (Fig 4.6) demonstrates their density in West Suffolk, and, by comparison, their relative paucity in parts of the east of the county, particularly in the Sandlings. The map is, however, for demesne flocks only and should be interpreted alongside the data related to freemen discussed earlier. Given that the region was inherently one of sheep-corn husbandry, there were almost certainly more sheep than the numbers mapped but that they were in the hands of the freemen rather than the demesne.

The documentation illustrating the involvement of the abbeys with sheep folding is variable: for Blythburgh, a *taxatio* of 1291 included foldage in the Priory’s assets; and grants of pasture for the Priory’s sheep, at Bregge in the early thirteenth century for 16 sheep in the grantor’s own sheepfold, and at Blyford- both indicative of the role of freemen in sheep farming.²⁵¹ The duties of the customary tenants of Blythburgh Priory in Hinton included carrying hurdles for the sheepfold and shearing the prior’s sheep. However, in 1254 it was agreed that those who were subject to this labour service should henceforth make a money payment for his sheep of 1d per four sheep.²⁵² Perhaps the number of customary tenant’s sheep in the flock made it more profitable to the Priory to charge them rather than pursue occasional services. The Sibton charters include several references to communal folding: one from Westleton c.1240 is a grant

²⁴⁹ Warner P, *Bloody Marsh*, Macclesfield, (2000), 41

²⁵⁰ Ibid, 123

²⁵¹ Harper-Bill, Blythburgh Cartulary1, p20, doc 117, doc 120

²⁵² Harper-Bill, Blythburgh Cartulary 2, doc 285

of lands and tenements and includes “*in communitate pasture et falde*”; a further and more specific example is a grant from the 1260s of a tenement, including arable land, and a freedom of fold.²⁵³ This is the only mention in all the charters examined of such a freedom and is in Heveningham and Thorpe which are a few miles west of the Sandlings on the Suffolk claylands.²⁵⁴

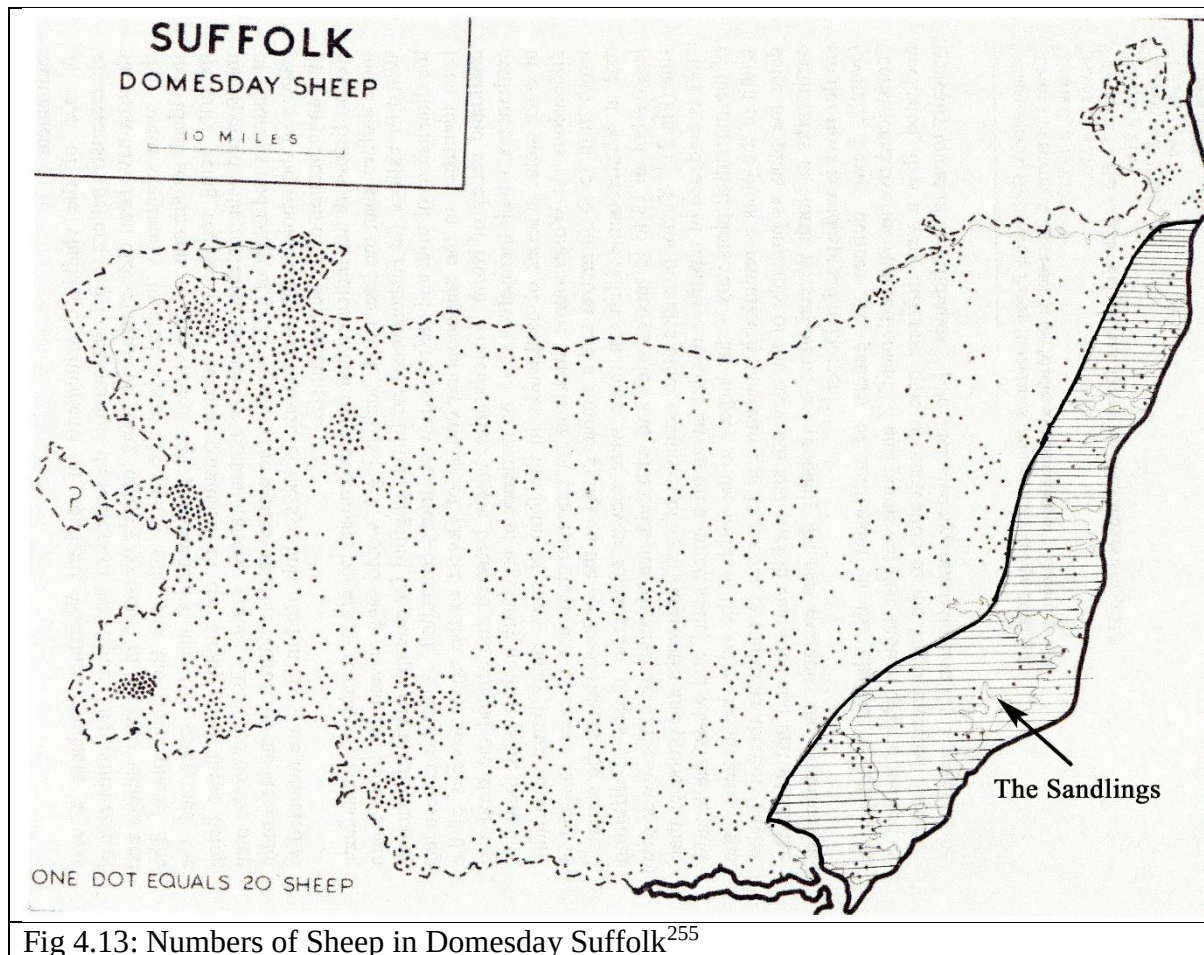


Fig 4.13: Numbers of Sheep in Domesday Suffolk²⁵⁵

Only three references to foldcourses in the Sandlings were found during the initial archival search: one is a lease of 1556-8 of lands and sheepcourses in a number of parishes on south western fringe of the Sandlings; another concerns the forcible entry into a foldcourse in Trimley, also on the fringes.²⁵⁶ The third is a lease for “500 acres of sheep course” in

²⁵³ Brown, Sibton Abbey 2, doc 81

²⁵⁴ Ibid, doc 413

²⁵⁵ Darby, 201

²⁵⁶ NA C1/1467/1-3; NA STAC 2/8

Walberswick in 1630.²⁵⁷ It is of note that the lease defines the foldcourse by area and not by the stint of sheep – an indication perhaps of the relative poverty of the soils. Warner described the upland commons of Walberswick, which extended to 800 to 1000 acres, as providing “desperately thin grazing”, and that enclosure of the heath into sheepwalks was underway by the early seventeenth century, putting pressure on the small landowners and tenants of the settlement for whom the commons and heaths represented a significant resource.²⁵⁸ By 1637 the manorial lord had two foldcourses on the heath with a demesne flock of some 700, the grazing for which extended into neighbouring Blythburgh and a document of 1556 also refers to the “foolde course and sheipe walke” between Blythburgh and Walberswick.²⁵⁹ A further reference, also from the sixteenth century, is to the lease of a foldcourse in Alderton.²⁶⁰

Postgate’s description of the seventeenth-century arrangements in the Sandlings with separate demesne and common sheepwalks is similar to the way such flocks were managed in other sheep corn countries such as the Wessex chalklands, and Warner specifically refers to the townsfolk’s flock of some 350 sheep at Walberswick in the seventeenth century.²⁶¹ The seventeenth-century arrangements thus appear, superficially at least, to be typical of sheep-corn husbandry rather than of the foldcourse.

Discussion

Whilst it is difficult to argue on the basis of what does not appear to have been practised – absence of evidence is not necessarily evidence of absence – the fact that the foldcourse did not become as “deeply entrenched” in the Sandlings as elsewhere in East Anglia requires some explanation.²⁶² The Sandlings, with their predominantly poor, sandy soils and extensive heaths meet the environmental requirements and could support (and needed) folds if not foldcourses. However, the dispersed pattern of settlement around commons and with isolated farms is distinctly different from the various degrees of nucleation to the west of the region. Similarly, the individual holdings in the open fields were clustered, as opposed to the scattered pattern in

²⁵⁷ SROI I HA 30/312/374

²⁵⁸ Warner, Bloody Marsh, 39, 35

²⁵⁹ Warner, Bloody Marsh, 39, 119

²⁶⁰ Williamson, Sutton Hoo, 56

²⁶¹ Postgate, Field Systems, 315; Kerridge, The Agricultural Revolution, 43; Warner, Bloody Marsh, 39

²⁶² Williamson, Sutton Hoo, 56

the west. This association of dispersed settlement and clustered holdings is significant and is a pattern similar to east Norfolk.

The Sandlings was a region of tenurial complexity and great numbers of freeholders. The latter also appear to have owned significant numbers of sheep. In addition, the manorial rights associated with the fold in other parts of East Anglia appear weak if not absent; similarly references to freedom of or liberty of fold are rare. Furthermore, as in east Norfolk, the numbers of late references to the 'foldcourse' in the Sandlings represent an attempt to impose a 'right' that had not previously existed. In the former case, Campbell has suggested that the absence of the foldcourse may be a reflection of the weakness of manorial lords.²⁶³ Similarly, a combination of weak lordship and large numbers of freemen in the Sandlings could mean that the manorial lords were unable to impose the foldcourse system. Alternatively, the manorial rights around faldage had not developed in the pre-Domesday period, hence the single reference to foldsoke in 1086. Several authors have offered ideas as to why the foldcourse was largely absent from the region. Postgate suggested that the extensive areas of enclosure in many townships had removed the need for open-field grazing. Open fields, however, were still in operation in a number of townships such as Sutton into the post medieval period.²⁶⁴ By contrast, Williamson has proposed that the availability of grazing available on the salt marshes and in the damp valleys that cross the Sandlings reduced the need for manorial control of the folds and fallows.²⁶⁵

I would suggest that the principal reason for the general absence of foldcourses was the pattern of dispersed settlement and clustered individual holdings that allowed the development of small flocks held by freemen and other tenants, operating individualistically or with *ad hoc* town flocks. This farming system persisted because of the tenurial structures, with large numbers of freemen, probably weak lordship and the consequent absence or non-enforcement of fold rights. The similarities to parts of east Norfolk may be significant in terms of structures such as tenure, settlement and holdings but also in the apparent late onset of the attempts to impose foldcourses.

²⁶³ Campbell, *Regional Uniqueness*, 26

²⁶⁴ Postgate, *Field Systems*, 315

²⁶⁵ Williamson, *Shaping Medieval Landscapes*, 138

CHAPTER 5: FARMING AND THE FOLDCOURSE

1. INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter I discussed the overall contexts of the foldcourse. The next two chapters will examine the interaction of the foldcourse and the farming regimes within which it operated, for it is impossible to understand the foldcourse without a consideration of the agrarian systems of which it was an integral component. It is arguable that this interaction, and the intimate relationship between the arable and pastoral elements of the foldcourse, are not usually fully discussed nor understood.

This chapter concentrates on the farming regimes, and begins with an examination of two forms of husbandry: convertible husbandry and, in particular the role of infield-outfield agriculture which I will argue was more common in the light soil regions of East Anglia than is usually credited, and has not previously been explored in detail. The discussion will include the management of the outfield both at a manorial and individual level. This will be followed by a review of the variety of cropping regimes in the Good Sands and Breckland regions in both infield and outfield, all of which share a common feature - the use of extended fallowing. The impact of extended fallowing will be examined in some detail; the intention being to explore how the benefits of the process might have applied in the period before the introduction of ‘designed’ grasses and clover in the seventeenth century. For this I will utilise a number of sources including modern texts on agricultural and soil sciences, arable set-aside and the ecology and practice of heathland regeneration.

I will commence, however, with a brief discussion of two of the principal sources of the evidence that will be used in this chapter and the next: leases and glebe land. A number of discussions in this chapter utilise evidence from leases, which were by the early eighteenth century “a fairly common tool of estate management”; though the degree to which tenants followed the requirements of their lease is a moot point.¹ The husbandry prescriptions of earlier (sixteenth-century) leases were, however, often vague or non-existent. The vagueness as to what was required of the lessee in the light soil regions of East Anglia may have been because “details had to be vague” (authors’ italics) given that the region was one were open-field arable

¹ Wade Martins, S. Williamson, T., ‘The Development of the Lease and its Role in Agricultural Improvement in East Anglia, 1660-1870’, *Agric History Review*, 46.2, (1998), 131, 132

predominated until the latter half of the eighteenth century; such fields being subject to communal control within which ‘individualised’ cropping requirements that disrupted the seasonal cycle would have been “difficult or impossible to follow”.² Husbandry clauses in a lease thus reflect “at most best practice” in the locality.³ The example of such best practice, from an early lease of 1562 with regard to summerlay in the open fields (p. 215) may thus be somewhat unusual for this date. It is also probable that foldcourse owners, being the lessors, would not want to make prescriptions that disrupted the operation of their foldcourse.

Glebe land is discussed below in relation to the antiquity of the outfield in some townships. Glebe has its origins in gifts of land made to a church, these endowments being for the maintenance of the church and a priest. Such private churches, commonly founded by manorial lords, were property; and through gifts of land, became themselves property owners.⁴ The churches of East Anglia were not, however, exclusively ‘manorial’ and numbers were also founded by freemen.⁵ More than twenty rural churches across the region were granted land by will in the mid eleventh century; the amount varying from 2 acres to half a hide, but typically 8 to 10 acres; and of the Norfolk churches mentioned in Domesday, 220 had endowments of land.⁶ The foundation of new churches without sufficient support for the priest and the structure was forbidden by a church council in 1102.⁷ Many churches received grants of land early in their history and the presence of glebe land in a given location is thus an indication of how long it has been farmed; and more pertinently its presence or absence in locations such as outfield, indicative of how long they may have been under the plough if only occasionally.

² Ibid, 129

³ Ibid, 141

⁴ Blair, J., *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society*, Oxford, (2005), 408, 407

⁵ Williamson, *Origins*, 156

⁶ Blair, 408, Williamson, *Origins*, 157

⁷ Blair, 408

2. HUSBANDRY REGIMES

The light soil regions of East Anglia that are associated with the foldcourse have in the past played host to two closely related types of farming: convertible husbandry and infield-outfield.

2.1 Convertible Husbandry

Convertible husbandry was a system by which, rather than the permanent establishment of separate arable and pasture lands, the land periodically alternated between arable and grass leys.⁸ Convertible husbandry is however a system of considerable antiquity. Ernle, described it as “the most primitive form of agriculture”, and writing of the 1920s, that “temporary leys of three to four year durations followed by...cereals” as “valuable” to those farming second class soils.⁹ These comments raise several separate issues: the quality of the soils on which convertible husbandry was practised; the duration of the leys; and by implication, the value or benefits of convertible husbandry compared to permanently separate arable and pasture.

There are a number of examples of convertible husbandry in the medieval period in the light soil regions of East Anglia, and the area as a whole saw the development of flexible and more intensive systems that were based on the development and utilisation of both arable and pastoral resources in a “complementary rather than competitive” fashion. By contrast the regular common fields of the Midland system “inhibited the development” of similar systems because of its structural rigidity and the focus of many demesnes, on arable production – Campbell going as far as to characterise some as “prairie farms”.¹⁰ Fitzherbert also favoured the complementary benefits of both arable and pasture: “for without both [corn and cattle] the husbandman shall be a buyer, a borrower, or a beggar and...sheepe are the most profitable”.¹¹

Temporary leys were, however, also present in the open fields of the Champion country by the Tudor period - but within communal control. These leys could be whole furlongs; alternatively, a tenant could lay individual strips to grass, but these had to be ‘enclosed’ with hurdles or his beasts had to be tethered to prevent them consuming the growing crops on the strips of other tenants in the furlong.¹² In Cambridgeshire, Postgate characterises leys as a response to soil exhaustion - as at Snailwell in 1566 when there were 100 acres of ley land in a number of

⁸ Kerridge, *Agricultural Revolution*, 180

⁹ Lord Ernle, *English Farming Past and Present*, London, (1936), 2 454

¹⁰ Campbell, *English Seigniorial Agriculture*, 179

¹¹ Fitzherbert, J., *Booke of Husbandrie*, (1598), Facsimile edition, Amsterdam, (1979), 45

¹² Thirsk, J., *Tudor Enclosures*, London, (1959), 16

fields.¹³ Both Campbell and Fox have identified similar if more temporary arrangements (*inhoks*) in the medieval open fields. The latter describes them as “a few acres...sown in the fallow” whilst Campbell suggests that they were portions of fallow sown with legumes as an “adjunct to pastoral husbandry”.¹⁴

Compared to the types of rotations practised in “regular” common fields, convertible husbandry in the medieval period prior to 1349 and the Black Death has been described by Kitsikopoulos as “less productive”, though somewhat better after the Black Death when demographic pressures on the need for arable land were less. These results were based on a cost, revenue and profit model of two hypothetical farms. To what extent a fair comparison is being made is questionable – as the author himself writes - the difference was largely due to the fact that a majority of the manors following a convertible regime were located on light soils.¹⁵ The sample of manors that employed “irregular and flexible field systems” comes predominantly from Sussex, Kent and East Anglia and in the last, of the eighteen manors, all but two are in the west of Norfolk and Suffolk.¹⁶

Kerridge’s preferred term for convertible husbandry is ‘up-and-down husbandry’, which he saw both as primarily a development of the early modern period, and one that was largely confined to the Central province, though it did, later, spread to areas such as the Vales of Evesham and Pickering, and Wiltshire.¹⁷ The early modern form of convertible husbandry praised by Kerridge was not, however, the same as that practised in the medieval period; for the introduction of leguminous crops such as clover were of “paramount importance” to that husbandry.¹⁸ In addition, as Broad has shown, the encouragement for convertible husbandry was in part based on the success of these changes, such as the introduction of turnips, in light soil regions of the country. On the heavier midland clays the success of the new crop regimes was more mixed: the land was more difficult to plough, turnips tended to rot and could not be fed off in the field; whilst on the other half of the equation it was difficult to raise good grass on old pastures once they were ploughed up, and the latter may have caused more harm than

¹³ Postgate, PhD, 211

¹⁴ Fox, *Alleged Transformation* 528; Campbell, *English Seigniorial Agriculture*, 229

¹⁵ Kitsikopoulos, K, ‘Convertible Husbandry vs Regular Common Fields: A Model of the Relative Efficiency of Medieval Field Systems’, *J. Economic History*, 64.2, (2004), 464

¹⁶ Kitsikopoulos, 464, 484 - Appendix 1

¹⁷ Kerridge, *Agricultural Revolution*, 194, 181, 213 - 215

¹⁸ Kitsikopoulos, 482, 483

good.¹⁹ Overall, alternate husbandry in the Midlands was “a phase of development” that after c.1650 was succeeded on the claylands by permanent pasture.²⁰ Allen is more scathing of Kerridge’s claims, suggesting that convertible husbandry was never practised on the scale that he claimed and “was not an important feature of Midland farming”.²¹

The introduction of rotational grasses in the seventeenth century thus provides a distinct and significant dividing line between the medieval and early modern periods. It is therefore important that discussions concerning the relative proficiency of convertible husbandry in the two periods recognise this division.²² Prior to that introduction one assumes that, when arable was laid down to grass, plant growth was adventitious and dependent on the local seed bank. The possible scenarios in this situation will be explored later; and, whilst there is no evidence for the collection of grass seed in the medieval period, this assumption may be false. The use of rotational grasses was, initially, haphazard rather than part of a pre-defined rotation, as was the introduction, in the same period and in a similar fashion, of clover. Their use as an integral part of a defined rotation was slow to develop and was predominantly a phenomenon of the eighteenth century.²³ The employment of ‘designed’ leys – that is the use of harvested seed of known varieties in known proportion as, for example, the mixture recommended by Ernle of rye grass, cocksfoot and “the essential addition” white clover, – would inevitably produce a more controlled and effective end result when compared to earlier adventitious or ‘haphazard’ mixtures and methods.²⁴

Sown leys also tend to dominate the discussion concerning the benefit and particularly the duration of leys. Thus Fream writing in the late nineteenth century, described leys of perennial ryegrass lasting, with “careful management”, twenty years or more on fertile soil, whilst leys of one to three years based on Italian ryegrass could be very productive.²⁵ Ernle settled on a shorter period with leys of two to four years - a figure which is similar to those recorded in medieval East Anglia but again based on sown leys.²⁶ Up-and-down husbandry in the Midlands appears to have operated with leys as long as twenty years though more typically they were

¹⁹ Broad, J., ‘Alternate Husbandry and Permanent Pasture in the Midlands, 1650-1800’, *Agric Hist Rev* (1980), 28.2, 83

²⁰ *Ibid*, 84, 89

²¹ Allen, R. C., *Enclosure and the Yeoman*, Oxford, (1992), 127, 128

²² Stapledon, G. R. Davies W., *Ley Farming*, London, (1948) journeytoforever.org/farm_library/ley/ley1.html

²³ *Ibid*

²⁴ Ernle, 454

²⁵ Spedding, C. R. W., ed *Freams Agriculture* 16th ed, London, (1983), 553, 554

²⁶ Ernle, 454

seven to twelve years.²⁷ These figures are consistent with Kitsikopoulos's view that the benefits of convertible husbandry accumulated in sandy soils "within five to ten years" from the laying down of leys and longer still in clay soils.²⁸ Stapledon and Davies put these various durations for leys into context - describing any ley, on whatever soil or seed composition and however well managed, as tending to resemble permanent grassland and cease to function as a ley after 10 – 15 years. On poorer soils and/or under "indifferent management" the ley has to be ploughed again after *circa* five years, and may be of less value than permanent grass.²⁹ It is difficult to judge the degree to which the evidence from sown leys can be applied to the re-growth and development of extended fallows, but the same authors do suggest that the "light sands" of Norfolk and Suffolk could be sown with corn and a ley mixture as first or second cereal crop to provide grazing after harvest and in subsequent years if left as a ley or extended fallow.³⁰

2.2 Infield-outfield

Whilst convertible husbandry and infield-outfield do overlap, the former had in essence two components of varying duration, and the latter was a less defined, more fragmented system – "inarticulate" to use Fowler's term.³¹ Infield-outfield agriculture was a system of considerable antiquity for the arable cultivation of marginal lands.³² Archaeological evidence for such a system was found at South Street long barrow in Wiltshire where the undisturbed soil beneath the barrow displays evidence of plough soil with intervening fallows and, at the top of the soil profile a layer of sheep grazed turf.³³ Fowler, in discussing infield-outfield agriculture in the first millennium AD, describes the practice as a "common way of using land" outside of the "champion" districts of England; and further that with a rising population "it would seem odd" if it had not been practised - "however informally". Whilst there is no proof for infield-outfield agriculture in this period, it was "neither backward nor primitive".³⁴

²⁷ Kerridge, *Agricultural Revolution*, 197; Broad, 78

²⁸ Kitsikopoulos, 463

²⁹ Stapledon, G. R. Davies W., *Ley Farming*, London, (1948), journeytoforever.org/farm_library/ley/ley2.html

³⁰ Stapledon, G. R. Davies, W., *Ley Farming*, London, (1948), journeytoforever.org/farm_library/ley/ley7.html

³¹ Fowler, P., *Farming in the First Millennium*, Cambridge, (2002), 217

³² Postgate, *Breckland*, 90

³³ Ingrouille, M., *Historical Ecology of the British Flora*, London, (1995), 215

³⁴ Fowler, 217

In essence, the system consisted of two components: an “intensively cultivated infield and periodically tilled outfield”.³⁵ As will be seen, ‘intensive’ is a relative term in the context of East Anglian practice but the system allowed for the cultivation of more land than was present in the permanently cultivated arable fields.³⁶ A further, and essential, element was the pastoral reserve of extensive heaths and wastes. By the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the cultivation of the outfield was, in a number of locations, part of a planned and regular, if differential, pattern of cultivation. At what point in time outfield cultivation became planned rather than *ad hoc* will depend upon the particular conditions of the township, and may, in some places, never have become part of a regular cycle – at West Wretham for example.

Saltmarsh and Darby were the first to describe the system in East Anglia. At West Wretham in the Brecklands, during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the infield may have been continuously cropped or alternatively followed a rotation that was more intensive than that of the outfield. The latter is much more likely as the evidence below will indicate. The outfield at West Wretham was divided into “seven breks or shifts” of arable that were folded once every seven years before being cropped for a few years then left as ‘waste’.³⁷ Allison saw Saltmarsh and Darby’s work as dating the origins of infield-outfield cultivation in East Anglia, but as Simpson pointed out, this was but the final phase of a much longer development and that the difficulty lies in the detection of the system “before adequate map- making”.³⁸ However, Mosby mapped both the distribution of the few references to infield-outfield system that he was able to locate in documents and maps, compared to the many references to brecks in the tithe awards for Norfolk - the latter displaying a much wider distribution in a broad arc across west Norfolk and the Good Sands region.³⁹

Dodgshon saw infield-outfield agriculture as having its origins in a more formal system intimately connected with the nature of the tenures and landholdings that characterise the regularity of the infield and the ‘looser’ control of outfield lands.⁴⁰ These differences were, however, ‘muted’ in East Anglia but such similar origins are still detectable in the regular holdings of the infield - as at West Wretham where the infield holdings were typically of 14

³⁵ Postgate, Breckland, 91

³⁶ Fowler, 216

³⁷ Saltmarsh, J. Darby, H. C., ‘The Infield-Outfield System on a Norfolk Manor’, *Economic History* 3 (1935), 36

³⁸ Allison, Sheep-corn Husbandry, 29; Simpson, Some Queries, 93

³⁹ Mosby, J. E. G., *The Land of Britain, Norfolk*, London, (1938), 131

⁴⁰ Dodgshon, R., *The Origin of British Field Systems: An Interpretation*, London, (1980), 95

acres – which holdings Dodgshon identifies as the “original nucleus of the tenements”.⁴¹ He further suggests that the outfield was “likely to have been held on a sub-divided field basis” when cropped; but, whilst only “partially occupied” compared to the infield, its tenurial status was the same.⁴² This suggests a system that was tenurially driven and to ignore the opportunism of individual farmers who might have ploughed up parcels of ‘waste’ (albeit on an *ad hoc* basis) that had the potential to yield an occasional crop - a practice that might long pre-date the acquisition of a manorial lord.

2.3 Breckland infield-outfield

The system of infield-outfield cultivation in Breckland was, Postgate suggested, distinctly different from that practised elsewhere, including the Good Sands region of Norfolk.⁴³ In the latter there was an “intensively cropped infield” and “periodically tilled outfield intakes” from the waste. In Breckland however there was a three-fold division in a system that he labelled “infield-outfield-breck”, where the open field incorporated lands that were subject to cropping regimes of differing intensity called infield and outfield - which Postgate labelled ‘infield’ – whilst the ‘outfield’ consisted of “brecks taken in from the heath”.⁴⁴ The outfield in Breckland was thus “considered part of the permanent arable”.⁴⁵ Postgate provides a number of examples of these different rotations of the arable: thus at Croxton in 1327 the open field contained lands that were designated as ‘infeldlond’ and ‘utfeldlond’; and at Stanford in 1560 where the six outfield shifts were cropped for no more than two years in succession, and one of the four infield shifts lay fallow each year. The third element – the brecks as outfield - is illustrated by the use of terms such as ‘breche’, ‘brake piece’ and a ‘newe fyelde’ created by ploughing up the sheepscourse at Methwold in 1575.⁴⁶ However, terms such as breck and brake piece must be treated with caution. As Bailey points out breck referred to any assart from the heath and not necessarily to temporary cultivation, and such labels, whilst they might be newly coined, may also refer to parcels coming into cultivation after a period as fallow; for the quantity of land that was sown was also a function of demand, but demand, one imagines, was at serious risk of outstripping supply both in terms of arable land and the necessary folding support.⁴⁷

⁴¹ Dodgshon, 92; Saltmarsh & Darby, 41; Dodgshon, 93

⁴² Dodgshon, 97

⁴³ Postgate, Breckland, 90

⁴⁴ Postgate, Breckland, 91

⁴⁵ Bailey, Marginal Economy, 58

⁴⁶ Postgate, Breckland, 91,92,93

⁴⁷ Bailey, Marginal Economy, 62, 57

Knowledge as to how the outfield and brecks were managed in the medieval period is limited. Infield-outfield cropping was, however, “central” to the regularly tilled Breckland arable; there being clear evidence for outfields in locations such as Brandon, Icklingham, Barnham and Risby in the medieval period; but the evidence for the irregular or temporary employment of brecks is rarer.⁴⁸

Bailey’s discussion about the meaning of “breck” is part of a more general problem when discussing agriculture in the light soil regions of East Anglia, which is the use of terms such as infield, outfield and brecks and the variable meaning of these and other terms that were employed. In applying different labels to the components of the infield-outfield in Breckland, Postgate is I think trying to define as regular a system that had given the inherently marginal quality of the soils, to remain variable and responsive to the prevailing conditions, and one that changed over time. The variable cropping intensity of infield, outfield and brecks was common across the light soil regions of East Anglia and the distinction made between Breckland and the Good Sands areas is I suggest a largely artificial one. The examples from Croxton and Stanford are little different to the sixteenth-and-seventeenth century pattern of cropping at Sedgeford and other townships in the Good Sands region discussed below; and whilst the pattern of cropping of the components of infield-outfield probably became more regular and defined in the early Modern period, the pattern was also one of adjustment to local conditions, as many of the examples discussed below will demonstrate; and the terminology such as infield, outfield, breck and sheep’s pasture – more fluidly used and thus less easily defined.

There are four ‘areas’ of land involved in the overall agrarian practices of the region and all of them, to widely varying degrees, were employed in arable cultivation. In broad terms the four were: infield, outfield, breck and heath. The essential distinction is the intensity with which the arable was cropped, which varied according to location, soil quality and probably time. Infield was the most intensively cropped land but fallows of more than one year were often a feature of the cropping pattern – for example at Elveden. At the other end of the spectrum were the heaths and wastes which, predominantly, were employed as pasture. Heathland was sometimes brought into cultivation (as at Sedgeford) and the ‘boundary’ between heath and breck was a fluid one. Pastures, whilst extensive, were frequently managed for the benefit of the grazing

⁴⁸ Ibid, 61, 62

and protection of the flocks, and also the maintenance of the pastures themselves. In some cases, the manorial warren also formed part of the equation as at Hilborough and Feltwell.⁴⁹

In the middle of the spectrum, the extent to which the outfield or breck was under the plough varied from place to place as did the terminology: outfield, breck, olland and sheep pasture were all variously employed for the less intensively cropped arable land. The following brief examples of the varied uses of these terms will all be discussed in greater detail below. At Massingham the Priory, c.1600, held “breck in the sheeps pasture”; the land in the three foldcourses (described as “sheeps pastures”) at Hillington was divided into furlongs.; at Grimston there was “24 acres of outway lands alias sheeps pastures...in diverse peces”; at Great Ringstead in 1650 references were made to “sheeps pasture lands unsown lying in South field” and “sheeps pasture brecks”; finally a terrier for West Wretham manor, 1659, includes “breaks or shifts of arable land called outfald land”.⁵⁰

Ollands, according to two seventeenth-century definitions were either “arable land which has been laid down in grass more than two years”; or “lay ground, old land that has lain untilled, and is newly ploughed”; - olland was thus clearly also outfield land.⁵¹ Gray, referring to Weasenham, describes ollands as parcels of land that could be ploughed as necessary and were “a reserve upon which the tenant could draw...to increase his allotment”.⁵² It is however unlikely that a lord would keep a ‘reserve’ as such; the land in question was almost certainly outfield, present in a location not commonly associated with the infield-outfield system. I would suggest that, in general, all of these terms are interchangeable. They all refer to lands that were tilled less regularly than the infield land and the frequency with which they were brought into cultivation was dependent on their quality and the demand for grain. Postgate himself pointed out that the boundaries between infield and outfield in Breckland were fluid and not defined by *quarantinae*, and may have fluctuated with lands in both categories at different times.⁵³ Saltmarsh and Darby also commented on the difficulty of drawing the boundary between outfield and waste at West Wretham.⁵⁴ Nor were the differences always topographical. Whilst at West Wretham the infield does appear to have been closest to the

⁴⁹ NRO HIL 3/16/1; MC 2411/1/20, 968x3

⁵⁰ NRO MS 20417, 126X6; NRS 26966, f 27; BL/CS/6/3/2/2, 2; LEST/FF 2, 1,7; NRS 18015, 41 C 7

⁵¹ Yaxley, D., A Researcher’s Glossary, Dereham, (2003)

⁵² Gray, 320

⁵³ Postgate, Breckland, 92

⁵⁴ Saltmarsh, Darby, 33 n3

settlement and the outfield a further ring around that; elsewhere the infield was not necessarily the land closest to the settlement.⁵⁵ For the topography of East Anglian infield-outfield systems was driven by the variability of the quality of the soil - by the rotation rather than location. There are, however, overall two types of infield-outfield regime in East Anglia, involving a two-or-three-fold division of infield plus brecks (for example at Sedgeford p. 243) or infield, outfield and brecks as at Grimston in a lease of 1661.⁵⁶

The role of the outfields and brecks undoubtedly intensified and became, by the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (as at Sedgeford and on the Townshend estates) a regular and defined part of the agrarian system in a number of townships. A 1631 terrier for Feltwell manor refers to 100 acres as being in the heath and having been “banked in plowed and sown...the ridges and furrows thereof are still plainly to be seene”. The land which has been at some time breck is described as “ancient arable” of the manor, lying outside the King’s warren.⁵⁷ The Bacon papers also provide occasional references to what are probably brecks rather than outfields: at Netherhall “I founde divers acres to ly in the sheppes pasture which I thought not good...it appeared thei had not latly bene broken up”.⁵⁸ At Wighton a survey refers to 160 acres called Eshyardes which some tenants said “they well remembred the Prior of Walsinghams plows there”.⁵⁹

2.4 The Management of Outfield Farming

Unlike the essentially individualistic organisation and absence of communal activity prevalent in eastern Norfolk,⁶⁰ the agrarian regimes in the west of the county did require some degree of seigneurial and/or communal involvement.⁶¹ At Elveden in 1616, for example, the setting out of “part sown” areas is an indication of the communal management as presumably the area sown would not have been that used previously, or to have the ‘part sown’ portion in scattered pieces would hinder the feeding of the flock.⁶² Similarly, the variation in cropping regimes between furlongs at Brandon, Langham and Felbrigg for example (p. 175) also suggests a more communal approach.

⁵⁵ Ibid, 34; Postgate, Breckland, 92

⁵⁶ NRO BL/CS/6/3/2

⁵⁷ NRO MC 2411/1/20, 13, 968x3

⁵⁸ Hassell Smith, A., Baker, G. M., Kenny, R. W., eds *The Papers of Nathaniel Baker of Stiffkey 1*, Norfolk Record Society XLVI, (1978), 72

⁵⁹ Ibid, 188

⁶⁰ Campbell, Manorial Structure, 251

⁶¹ Campbell, Commonfield Origins, 115

⁶² Postgate, Breckland, 93

That the management of infield-outfield agriculture made considerable demands is illustrated by the memoranda book of John Skayman. Skayman was employed by Roger Townshend as his bailiff or steward, maintained a record of his activities from 1516 to 1518. These activities included, as the editors' point out, bringing brecks into and out of cultivation.⁶³ For example at "Bermer to ley owte the bryke there"; and "leyd owte of the pastur there in to the tylth"; at Helhoughton where "all the tenuantes having lands thys yere in the new bryke that shall the next yer breke in the ouer pastur [that is the] furlongs being ny to Westreynham felde for as that yere the tenautes in Westreynham shall breke in ther feld wich...lately leid in to the pastur".⁶⁴

One can also add several examples from Skayman's book relating to Shereford: "I toke in to the pastur a furlong callyd Byggyns and a nother...called Blaklong and leyd owte of the pastur Sledue furlong and part other iij furlong"; and "payd...for xxv acre of lond in shepypastur ther and then...shew hym to thos lands that he schal breyck ther this yer".⁶⁵ Another, also probably from Shereford and indicating what was probably a liberty of fold rather than a foldcourse given the restricted nature of the right, describes how "the seid prior may when he breyk vpp his lands tath the same lands whith his own folde and no man denyyd it and he may ley a parte of his shepys pastur with yn the same field".⁶⁶ Finally, at Bircham Newton: "to make a bill of euery mannys parcel what he had with yn the sheppypaster of new leyd yn lond"; and at Burnham where Townshend had in the "pastur [27½ acres in three pieces] wherof vj acre dimidia hys thys yer in tylthe".⁶⁷

These extracts demonstrate that infield-outfield cultivation or "brecking", and the use of the term 'sheeps pasture', was a regular practice on the Townshend estate in the 'Good Sands' region. Furthermore, they demonstrate the predominance of the furlong, rather than the field, as the basis of management. It may also be that the expression "laying out" indicates that the tenants may not have had a fixed location for their lands. Skayman's book also illustrates both what a regular task the management of the infield-outfield was and the degree of organisation required. Furthermore, given Skayman's position, it illustrates a degree of manorial rather than

⁶³ Moreton, C. Rutledge, P., eds *Farming and Gardening in Late Medieval Norfolk*, Norfolk Record Society 61, Norwich, (1997), 97

⁶⁴ Ibid, f 14v, 15r, 33r

⁶⁵ Ibid, f 12r, 11r

⁶⁶ Ibid, f 25r

⁶⁷ Ibid, f 7r, 14v

communal control. This is not surprising given the Townshend's need to balance the relative elements of 'their' sheep and the tenants' corn.

2.5 Individual Infield-Outfield Operations

How infield-outfield agriculture was managed at an individual level is illustrated in the following examples. The first is from Great Massingham in the Good Sands region. The lands of Massingham Priory, c.1600, consisted of 75 acres of arable in the field [infield] in "dyverse small peces" under a four-course rotation of "som[er]ly, rye, barley and oats"; there was also 25 acres "breck in the shepes pasture yerly".⁶⁸ The "yerly" implies I suggest that this was the amount of cropped land, and that the Priory's holding was a multiple of that 25 acres.

The second, also relating to Massingham, comes from a sixteenth-century extent of William Elwyn's farm. Elwyn held 36 acres in 14 parcels, mostly in West field. In addition, under the heading "owte field" it states that "he hathe...xx acres in what furlong he knoweth not because they are shyfted forth of one place to an other yearly".⁶⁹ His use of the word 'shyfted' is probably referring to an annual change around, rather than a shift in the outfield; and the implication is that a portion of the township's outfield was ploughed each year and 'allotted' to the individual farmers, and then left to lay long for several years. The alternative is that his 20 acres were in scattered parcels in a number of outfield locations which came into tilth on an occasional, perhaps regular basis, but in that case he would surely have known where they were. Elwyn accounted for the twenty acres of outfield as follows: "alwayes five acres...whet or rye...five acres barley...five acres peas or oates five acres fallow".⁷⁰ This is probably his infield crop regime, given that it is very similar to the Massingham Priory example, and which he is using as he says to "account" for his outfield lands. Whilst in any one year three quarters of his infield lands were cropped, this seems unlikely for the outfield which would have laid longer; and his 15 cropped acres in the outfield were only part of his holding there. Great Massingham therefore had an infield four-course rotation with one year fallow and the outfield was variously labelled 'owte field', 'breck' or 'sheeps pasture'. There was at least one

⁶⁸ NRO MS 20417, 126X6

⁶⁹ NRO NAS 1/1/18/12

⁷⁰ Ibid

foldcourse in the township - a document of the first half of the sixteenth century listing the tenants who hire “breck grounds belonging to Hincham fouldcourse”.⁷¹

The third example is from Stanford in the Breckland, where, in 1470, a grant was made of the land of John Greve de Stanford; consisting of 15 acres of “infeld” land and 66 acres of “outfeldland”.⁷² Given that the document is a grant of land presumably the 66 acres of outfield would also have been identifiable as ‘his’ land and therefore was his total outfield holding rather than the land being cropped in a given year. Greve also held a liberty of fold.

Dodgshon suggested that the balance of landholding in the infield and outfield would be similar.⁷³ Bailey, however, writes that, given the demand for infield land and the consequent sub-division thereof, holdings would be smaller than those of outfield land – at Risby for example there was a ten-fold difference.⁷⁴ This example involves a much greater area of land (over 700 acres) than those above; one would however expect the outfield holding to be larger given the lower intensity of its cultivation. The examples above, where an individual outfield holding had a given acreage but not a fixed or defined location, may represent the way in which the outfields were managed initially; but as Skayman’s book makes clear, a move towards a much more formal system was underway by the sixteenth century.

2.6 Infield-outfield in Other Regions.

The Infield-outfield system of agriculture was a feature of agriculture in parts of west Norfolk and Suffolk, but it is principally associated with the upland regions of the British Isles, including Scotland and Northumbria.⁷⁵ To what extent, however, was it also practised in other lowland regions of England, and in particular with areas of light soils and heathlands? On the wolds of the East Midlands and in Sherwood Forest there were examples of such cultivation in the later middle ages. At Stanton-on-the-Wolds (Notts) it is characterised as a ‘reversion’ caused by population decline. In other forest villages, however, it had always been practised, in part because of the constraints of Forest Law. At Carburton a map of 1615 shows three small common fields surrounded by a large outfield, 518 acres of which are described as “the waste

⁷¹ NRO NRS 7674

⁷² NRO BL/MD/53/7

⁷³ Dodgshon, 97

⁷⁴ Bailey, *Marginal Economy*, 61

⁷⁵ Whittington, G., ‘Field Systems of Scotland’, in *Studies of Field Systems in the British Isles*, ed Baker, A. R. H., Butlin, R. A., Cambridge, (1973), 532; Butlin, R. A., ‘Field Systems of Northumberland and Durham’, in *Studies of Field Systems in the British Isles*, ed Baker, A. R. H., Butlin, R. A., Cambridge, (1973), 136

lying in brecks” and there were other smaller areas of brecks in the township.⁷⁶ The use, in an East Midlands context, of the term ‘breck’ which is commonly seen as confined to East Anglia is unusual. At Edwinstowe, in the sixteenth century, infield and outfield were divided by the type of crops grown: the former being for the crops for the inhabitants and winter feed for stock; whilst the outfield grew cash crops.⁷⁷

A similar division of use occurred at Alfriston (East Sussex) in the fifteenth century where the outfield was cropped for fodder whilst the infield grew grain for human consumption and was maintained by folding.⁷⁸ At Westerham (Kent) in the first half of the fourteenth century there was an infield nucleus of c.120 acres with a three-course rotation, together with a “sporadically cultivated” outfield of 400 to 600 acres where the lands were cropped for four or five years successively then left to recover, whilst some lands were sown “only at long intervals”. At both Alfriston and Westerham, the outfields lay on the lighter soils of the greensand formation, and in general farmers in Kent and Sussex in the late Middle Ages followed “some form of convertible husbandry”.⁷⁹

The Wolds of East Yorkshire remained an area of infield-outfield agriculture until well into the eighteenth century, and Parliamentary Enclosure.⁸⁰ Harris suggests that such husbandry was “probably more widespread” than the few direct references indicate. It was common on the wolds to leave tilled land to lie fallow for several years between successive crops – such ‘long fallows’ being recorded at Leatham and Strickland in 1794 and 1812 respectively – and both townships had outfields that were cropped at intervals of three to seven years.⁸¹ At Helperthorpe in 1772 the arable was divided between six “inn ffield ffalls” (furlongs) and six “out ffield falls”, the former being cropped three years before fallowing, whilst the latter was cropped once then fallowed. Kilham, in 1729, was divided into two ‘fields’, but cropping was by furlong; and some of these furlongs were, however, outfield and referenced as such in manorial documents. There are also indications that infield-outfield husbandry was practised at Bishop Wilton in 1611, in the early eighteenth century at Wetwang, and Fimber.⁸²

⁷⁶ King, E., ‘The East Midlands’, in *AHEW III*, ed Miller, E., Cambridge, (1991), 75; Beresford, M. W., St Joseph, J. K., *Medieval England*, Cambridge, (1979), 47

⁷⁷ King, 75

⁷⁸ Baker, A. R. H., ‘Field Systems of Southeast England’, in *Studies of Field Systems in the British Isles*, ed Baker, A. R. H., Butlin, R. A., Cambridge, (1973), 426

⁷⁹ Ibid, 416, 417; Mate, M., ‘Kent and Sussex’, in *AHEW III*, ed Miller, E., Cambridge, (1991), 284

⁸⁰ Harris, A., *The Open Fields of East Yorkshire*, York, (1959), 22

⁸¹ Ibid, 7, 6

⁸² Ibid, 7

The upland heaths and wolds of Lincolnshire might seem a likely place for infield-outfield cultivation to have taken root - evidence is however scant. The two areas are separated by a clayland vale; to the east of which lay the chalk wolds and to the west the limestone ridge and heath.⁸³ Most upland villages probably had a two-field system with one of them in fallow each year, and the wastes on higher ground were employed as sheepwalks.⁸⁴ In a number of locations ley farming was also practised and this may have, in part served a similar function to infield-outfield in terms of allowing the arable lands to ‘recover’. At Waddington in 1609 lands were described as having “been ploughed, now leys” and of a pasture with “signs of ridge and furrow” in it.⁸⁵ By the seventeenth century some farmers - at South Ormsby for example - were “compelled” to adopt leys and leave the more barren parts of their fields as fallow. In effect what seems to have been practised, out of necessity – was extended fallowing or temporary leys. Similarly, at Honington on Kesteven Heath the land was “barren and worn out of heart” and 200 acres of it so poor it was customary “to leave it to lie ley and unsown for several years to recover heart again”.⁸⁶ The clearest example of infield-outfield practice occurs in a lease from Scamblesby in 1690, the detail of which is very similar to the terms found in the leases for brecks or sheepwalks in Norfolk at the same date. The tenant of the sheepwalk “undertook to plough 20 acres a year for three years then lay them down to grass and plough the next 20 acres. In an East Anglian context those 20 acre parcels would be labelled a ‘breck’. To what extent this lease is exceptional is not clear but Thirsk seems to think it so, commenting that leases usually forbade “any ploughing of the sacred grasslands”.⁸⁷

This brief overview indicates that infield-outfield regimes were practised in a number of light land locations in eastern and south-east England in the medieval and early modern periods. The impression is that this type of farming was, with the exception of the Yorkshire Wolds, perhaps conducted on an *ad hoc* basis; or in Lincolnshire adopted as a last resort. Nowhere does there appear to be the degree of organisation and ‘fine tuning’ that is found in parts of East Anglia by the seventeenth century; nor of any greater sub-division than the twofold one of infield and outfield.

⁸³ Thirsk, J., *English Peasant Farming*, London, (1957), 79

⁸⁴ *ibid*, 85

⁸⁵ *Ibid*, 89

⁸⁶ *Ibid* 166

⁸⁷ *Ibid* 171 & fn 34

3. CROPPING REGIMES

3.1 Introduction

Implicitly, Allison and others' descriptions of a winter and spring sowing plus fallow is that of a three-course rotation.⁸⁸ More explicitly, the Good Sands region has been characterised as having one third of land usually in fallow in any given year – i.e. a three-course rotation.⁸⁹ I will demonstrate that this is too fixed a view, and that across all of the light soil regions of East Anglia a range of responses to the environmental conditions were adopted - for as Campbell has written, the nature of the sequences and frequency of cropping and fallowing were of “almost infinite variation” in medieval Norfolk.⁹⁰ The following is a review of cropping regimes in the medieval and early modern period in the two regions of the Good Sands and Breckland; but the first part is a discussion of the term ‘shift’ and the role of summerlay.

3.2 Shifts

The shift was the term frequently used in East Anglia to describe the combination of the pattern of cropping and the land being cropped. The number of shifts, strictly speaking, need not have been more than one, for once the fallow ‘shift’ was defined the rest of the land could be arranged to suit those farming the lands - as may have happened in the management of regular open fields. The importance of the shift with regard to the foldcourse, as Allison saw it, was in relation to the combination, common in East Anglia, of multi-manorial vills and an irregular distribution of individual holdings. Clustered holdings were not, however, a common feature of west Norfolk fields and the examples quoted by Allison are more representative of infield-outfield agriculture. Thomas Russell of West Rudham in the late sixteenth century described how “the custom time out of mind has been that lands lying in the fields...have been divided into several shifts or parts of which some have been used yearly and every year and in course have been sown with corn, and some yearly left fallow [and] the sheep of the...foldcourse can more conveniently feed” if the shifts were observed by his tenants.⁹¹ Russell does not indicate how many shifts, and the fact that some were used yearly (and presumably some were not) may indicate a version of infield-outfield.

⁸⁸ Allison, *Sheep-Corn Husbandry*, 20

⁸⁹ Postgate *Field Systems*, 300

⁹⁰ Campbell, *English Seigniorial Agriculture*, 293

⁹¹ Allison, *Sheep-corn Husbandry*, 20

There are a number of late sixteenth-and early-seventeenth-century documents from East and West Rudham - a field survey of 1592 of both parishes, rentals including one specifically for the manor of Northall, and a terrier of 1594 - none of which unfortunately mention shifts.⁹² An extent of 1609 enumerates the Russell lands in West Rudham and includes 427 acres of sheep's pastures and some 300 acres of arable in fifty pieces.⁹³ Given the previous discussion concerning terms such as 'sheep's pastures', the 427 acres of such may indeed have been outfield. The 1592 survey also includes the common pastures and sheep's pastures in East Rudham.

Postgate described shifts as "the only method compatible" with the operation of the foldcourse, and saw a uniform cropping practice as essential for the management of communal husbandry and the provision of grazing facilities which was achieved by the imposition of regular cropping shifts on a "haphazard agglomeration of embryonic fields".⁹⁴ In this situation shifts are an early development coterminous with the development of common fields and part of the evolution of a 'mature' [i.e. Midland] field system. This description is consistent with the then current view of the Midland system as representing a more "mature" arable common field system.⁹⁵ However, in most of East Anglia 'progress' was halted at the stage of regular cropping shifts on an irregular pattern of fields.⁹⁶ Such was the situation in south-east Cambridgeshire, as at Cambridge where by 1474 there were three shifts: one formed of one field plus a furlong of another field; the second was part of a further field; and the third was in two sections a mile apart.⁹⁷

The term shift was also in use in Breckland by the fourteenth century – as at Brandon (oats shift), Barnham (fyvefurlong shifte), and in 1338 at Thetford (Welstugesmereschift).⁹⁸ The Oxford Dictionary defines a shift as "each of the successive crops in a course of rotation". The Middle English 'schift' is similar to various Scandinavian and German words and the modern Swedish 'skift' also means crop rotation.⁹⁹ A shift has been defined by a number of authors as variously: "groups of furlongs or strips"; or "groups of lands cropped alike in any one year";

⁹² NRO BL/T 13/36; BL/T 13/16-25; BL/T 12/7

⁹³ NRO BL/MD 6, 20

⁹⁴ Postgate, Breckland, 88

⁹⁵ Thirsk, 'The Common Fields', 56

⁹⁶ Postgate, Field Systems, 294

⁹⁷ Postgate, Field Systems, 298

⁹⁸ Bailey, Marginal Economy, 59

⁹⁹ OED online

and finally: the unit of cropping but one not tied to a field, variable in size and in which the lands need not be adjacent.¹⁰⁰ At Saffron Walden by 1400 the furlongs appear to have been laid out in embryonic shifts; each foldcourse containing, within its boundaries, lands that were in each of the three stages of the crop rotation. However, the furlongs were generally “grouped together” and thus provided a greater amount of land under one crop than one furlong would - as Cromarty says: “a practical measure to facilitate the herding of the flocks...without a maze of fencing being necessary”.¹⁰¹

The shift has been further characterised by Allison as: “fallow and sown land should be as compact as possible and winter and spring sown crops separate”.¹⁰² Shifts “provided the necessary compact areas of fallow and stubble for its [the foldcourse] management”¹⁰³ Allison and Postgate thus emphasise the compactness of the shift, which if taken literally indicates that a shift was a coherent block of land set aside for a single purpose. Both are also writing in a post-medieval context; whilst Bailey, describing medieval Breckland, sees the shift as: “no more permanent than the crop rotation which they applied and so the number of shifts operating... could vary according to necessity”; neither was a shift a coherent parcel of land: “there is no reason why lands comprising a given shift should themselves be adjacent, nor was it necessary for a whole field...to fall within one shift”.¹⁰⁴ There are therefore three aspects to shifts: their organisation both in the agrarian sense and the management of the lands within them; the topography of the shift itself; and the role of the shift within the cropping regime.

The Organisation of Shifts

Allison described the shift as requiring “customary regulations”;¹⁰⁵ whilst Bailey sees it as “the best indication that a form of communal cropping was in operation” – evidence for which, in medieval Breckland, is “limited”.¹⁰⁶ Given, however, the relative poverty of the Breckland soils and the consequent need for the arable to be regularly manured, “some form of informal co-operation...must have been necessary in order to leave compact [that word again] areas of fallow for grazing each year” - thus at Lakenheath, tenants sowed their lands “by reasonable

¹⁰⁰ Postgate, *Field Systems*, 299; Bailey, *Marginal Economy*, 57; Martin, Satchell, 20

¹⁰¹ Cromarty, 9, map 3

¹⁰² Allison, *Sheep-Corn Husbandry*, 20

¹⁰³ Postgate, *Field Systems*, 319

¹⁰⁴ Bailey *Marginal Economy*, 57

¹⁰⁵ Allison, *Sheep-Corn Husbandry*, 20

¹⁰⁶ Bailey *Marginal Economy*, 59

courses”.¹⁰⁷ The term shift is clearly in common use in the medieval period and at Chippenham in eastern Cambridgeshire, there is evidence, from the fifteenth century of some degree of communal cropping with fines for sowing out of season and common rights of pasture.¹⁰⁸ Bailey suggests that shifts were at their “most advanced” in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, particularly in relation to infield-outfield systems, by which time they were easier to impose, given stronger seigneurial control together with more concentrated land ownership.¹⁰⁹ There are however a number of examples below from the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century which indicate that shifts were a well organised process by that time.

The balance between imposition from above as opposed to agreement within the community is unclear. Postgate wrote that “[the foldcourse] required closest co-operation between landlord and tenant. It was essential that occupiers of...strips complied with a common system of cropping shifts”.¹¹⁰ Whilst the following are of seventeenth-century date, they do indicate agreement rather than imposition - but to what degree agreement was freely given is unknown. A lease of 1688 states that the fields or closes are not to be ploughed or tilled in any other way than in the shifts and “according to the usuall course that been agreed by the inhabitants of Shouldham”;¹¹¹ and at Weeting in 1604, whilst not to do with the shifts *per se*, an agreement was made concerning the feed of sheep in adverse weather; not in itself unusual but the three parties signing the agreement, include as well as the manorial lords five “inhabitants” of the town.¹¹²

The Topography of Shifts

The example above from Cambridge (p. 168) illustrates a shift pattern that involved a three-course rotation, but one that is spatially discontinuous whilst at the same time being ‘compact’ in the sense of being in discrete blocks. The emphasis on the compact nature of the shift also indicates that they are viewed as consolidated blocks of lands, but not however whole fields.

Shifts thus differ from the Midland system in that shifts whilst organised in rotations, are not necessarily or in practice a single unit of land. Consolidation must, however, have been

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, 58, 59

¹⁰⁸ Spufford, Cambridgeshire Community, 19

¹⁰⁹ Bailey, Marginal Economy, 57, 59

¹¹⁰ Postgate, Field Systems, 319

¹¹¹ NRO HARE 2755, 199X1

¹¹² NRO MS 13485 40 C 6

inevitable over time. The alternative, a scatter of individual holdings that could in theory at least be cropped at the will of the tenant, would defeat the object of the shift - which is not to say that sowing out of course did not occur – for it was often a cause of arguments, as at Docking, West Rudham, Holkham and Holme.¹¹³

Evidence for the layout of shifts is limited, but the example from Saffron Walden above (p.87) suggests that to see them simply as an issue of cropping is a partial view, and that they were also organised within a foldcourse. Map evidence, admittedly of a late date, indicates that shifts were continuous blocks of land within which the several manors of a township held portions. At Chippenham Spufford suggests that, in the late medieval period, at least some fields were “created for a functional purpose rather than being purely topographical”. She then goes on to say that “the rotation worked in them was probably a highly complex one”.¹¹⁴ It is also possible that the functional purpose for which the fields were created was to lay out a continuous shift to be sown in season.

A number of the documents appear to refer to shifts and fields indiscriminately and to treat the terms as synonymous. Thus, at Elveden in 1616 there were “six shiftes and feldes”; at Langford in 1636 the arable lands are described as “brecks or shifts”; and at Downham (Suffolk), a lease of 1621 describes the arable land of the manor of Merseys as “lying dispersedlie in the shifts and fields” of the town.¹¹⁵ These seventeenth-century examples suggest that the difference in meaning between ‘shift’ and ‘field’ in terms of the degree of permanence and function was becoming increasingly blurred. Thus, at Kennet (Suffolk) by 1670 a cropping regime based on three equal sized fields had developed - these fields were, however, also known as shifts.¹¹⁶ At West Acre a mid-eighteenth-century deed lists lands in Thorp Cross Shift, Timber Hill Shift and Castle Acre Shift, and in order for these lands to be described in a lease, the shifts that are identified must presumably have been a permanent feature.¹¹⁷ Eighteenth-century map evidence confirms that as in the seventeenth-century examples the distinction between shift and field is blurred: at Stetchworth (Cambs) a map of 1770 (Fig 5.1) shows three shifts in blocks though the blocks do not follow conventional boundaries such as roads. A map of 1806

¹¹³ Allison, *Sheep-Corn Husbandry*, 26; NRO LEST/P20, 98

¹¹⁴ Spufford, *Cambridgeshire Community*, 19

¹¹⁵ Postgate, *Breckland*, 89; NRO PTR 1/123, 756X9; NRO MC 98/1/18

¹¹⁶ Postgate, *Field Systems*, 299

¹¹⁷ NRO BIR 14, 396X6

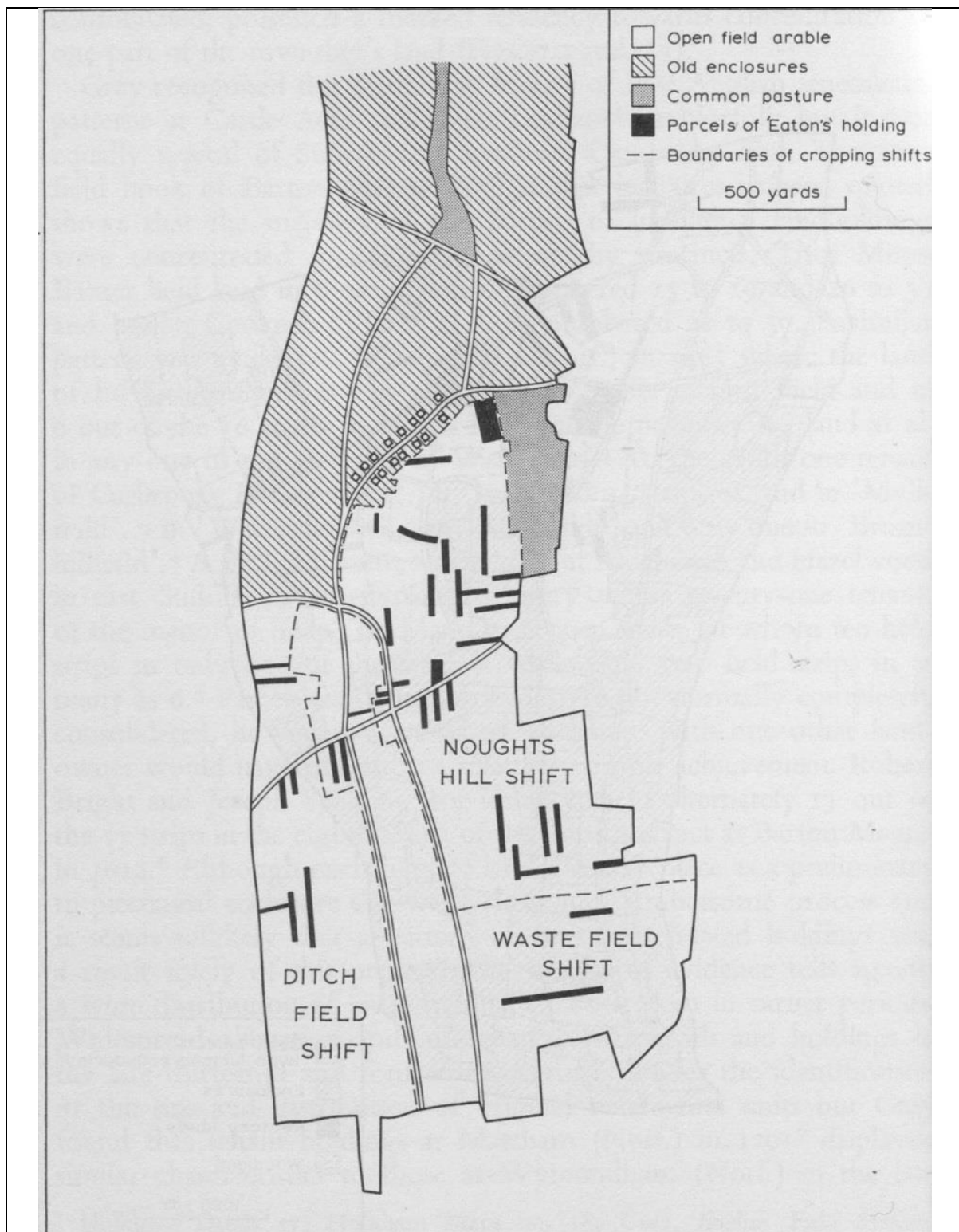


Fig 5.1: Open Fields of Stetchworth, 1770¹¹⁸

¹¹⁸ Postgate, *Field Systems*, 310

of Girton's estate in Barrow (Suffolk) shows the open-field lands of the manor in three shifts. The size of the demesne holdings was similar in each shift with 117 acres in Broomfield shift, 119 acres in Mill field shift and 105 acres in Emmanuel shift.¹¹⁹ Such equal division is also reflected, on a smaller scale, in a lease of 1709 for an estate in Tuddenham (Suffolk) which includes a specific statement regarding "all those three shifts of arable lands...containing thirty acres...ten acres in every shift".¹²⁰

The meaning of the term 'shift' is thus less clear cut than is sometimes implied and can be used for a fixed area or block of land, a field, or a unit in the crop rotation; and over time it became synonymous with 'field' in the looser East Anglian sense of the word. The primary role of the shift was, however, twofold: to define the unit of crop rotation and consequently the area of fallow and the blocks of land that the flocks could feed over.

3.3. Summerlay

Summerlay is a term that often appears in documents which might be taken to imply that the land was at rest. It was, rather, the preparation stage for land that was being brought back into cultivation after a period of fallow. The following description of the process comes from Flempton, Hengrave and Lackford in 1562.¹²¹ It involved 14 parcels of land that were in the 'somerlay' shift. Some lands were "thryse plowed" others "thryse plowed" and then "compassed" (manured) "wi[t]h the carte" or "w[it]h the folde"; on some lands the fold tathed only part of the parcel. Other parcels were only ploughed twice, and yet others were "erred" (ploughed) twice and then tathed. Clearly, summerlay was not a 'one-size-fits-all' process: the use of the cart rather than the fold is presumably based on distance from the farmyard; but the other variables must derive from experience and the nature of the soil. A similar regime was prescribed at Great Ringstead in 1650 whereby the lands that were brecks coming into tillage "to be yearly well and seasonably compassed and double tathed by...the respective flocks of sheep...before 25th August further single tathed by 1st November".¹²²

¹¹⁹ SROB, 1167/1

¹²⁰ SROB, FL 644/11/3.1

¹²¹ SROB 449/9/12

¹²² NRO LEST/FF 2, 8

3.4 Cropping Regimes in the Good Sands

The first two examples, it should be noted, pre-date the Black Death and are thus not a consequence of any relaxation of the need to maximise cropping due to a reduction in the size of the population. Peterstone Priory had 86 acres of land at Holkham according to a terrier of 1315 with a cropping regime of winter (wheat, rye, maslin), spring (barley, oats, peas) and fallow. Spring sown crops predominated with 37½ acres but the proportion of land in fallow was 38 acres (44%), indicative of fallowing of more than one year.¹²³ At Bircham, between 1341 and 1345, the rotation on the 117 acres of demesne was barley succeeded by rye and oats which was followed by three or four years lying fallow. Winter sown rye in the middle of the rotation is unusual - rotations commonly began, after fallowing with winter sown wheat or rye and finished with oats - but barley was perhaps a more valuable crop at Bircham as it appears to have been at Holkham.¹²⁴ Approximately half of the land was fallow in any given year, with the number of separate parcels varying from 13 to 16 and the sown parcels were typically less than five acres. Cropping was not apparently by furlong - at least in the larger ones. For example, the demesne had four parcels in Ethelhowe of which in 1341 one was sown with rye and the other three were in fallow; in Besmerecroft in the same year there were three demesne parcels: one was fallow, one sown with barley and the third with wheat.¹²⁵

At Langham by contrast, in the period 1364 to 1369, the 193 acres of demesne, which was in parcels of c. ten acres, was cropped four years and fallowed for one year. The cycle was wheat/barley/barley/oats/fallow, though beans were also sown. In such a regime fallow formed a smaller proportion of the farmed area and over the four years documented was around 21%, compared to 50% at Bircham. Langham, with less than a quarter of the land in fallow in any year, is representative of fallowing for a single year and this figure may indicate significant inputs of labour, manure and the folding of sheep. The extent to which Langham may be exceptional is further indicated by comparison with nearby Thornage where, in the 1370s, the cycle was “much less regular” than that at Langham, though some of the land appears to have been under a similar cycle to that at the latter.¹²⁶ Such localised variations within townships may well be more common than the evidence indicates and was probably a response to the mosaic pattern of soil quality illustrated in the map of Helhoughton (Fig 2.8).

¹²³ Hassall, Beauroy, 336

¹²⁴ Campbell, *English Seigniorial Agriculture*, 296, 299

¹²⁵ *Ibid*, 268, 269

¹²⁶ *Ibid*, 295

The Helhoughton soil map is also relevant to the detail that Gray provides on the lands and cropping regime of George Elmdon at Weasenham; for the township lies in the south-west corner of the map. In 1584, Elmdon described his lands as follows: 40.75 acres winter corn stubble to sow barley in 1585; 61.5 acres winter corn and messylen sown at Michaelmas and Ascension; 13.75 acres of olands broken up autumn 1584 for barley; and 48 acres somerlies for 1585. He thus had 116 acres in total sown for harvest in 1585, together with 48 acres summerlay or fallow and the sown acreage was similar in other years varying from 100 to 120 acres.¹²⁷ Elmdon possessed 199 acres of open-field arable and 71 acres of enclosed arable and meadow. Depending on how much of the enclosed land was arable, it would appear that Elmdon was cropping around half of his arable land each year. The implication being that whilst he was following a three-course rotation, some of his land at least was fallowed for two years, or perhaps longer.¹²⁸ Gray does comment that some of Elmdon's land "fails to appear" because laid down to grass. The olands may be the missing link, for in 1584 Elmdon's description of the 13¾ acres includes: 6¼ acres of 'old olland'; 1 acre of 'olland latelie layd'; 3 roods of olland very latelie layd - clearly the parcels to be broken up have been left fallow for varying lengths of time.¹²⁹

The final example, from the light soil area of the north Norfolk heathlands, is Felbrigg where what is characterised, by Campbell, as a "fully fledged convertible regime" was being followed, with lands, mostly c. ten acres, cropped for two, three or four years then left fallow for a similar period. Thus, between 1400 and 1408, in Bullokyscroft the cycle was four years fallow followed by four years cropping (wheat, barley, oats, barley); whilst in Churchmere it was three years fallow, one year barley, three years fallow, one year wheat. Examples of similar leys or long lays also occurred in other light soil locations such as Ashill and Thornage.¹³⁰

3.5 Breckland Cropping Regimes

The first example is of the demesne at Brandon in 1363, where 109 acres were sown or leased; 50 acres were to be seeded the next year; whilst 405 acres were pastured by sheep and were outfield. Four of the fields at Brandon (Womanlodefeld, Drovefeld, Fourhowefeld and

¹²⁷ Gray, H., *English Field Systems*, London, (1959), 318, 320

¹²⁸ Gray, 318, 321

¹²⁹ Gray, 318-9

¹³⁰ Campbell, *English Seigniorial Agriculture*, 295, 297

Bridhythefeld) were infield and cultivated on a four-course rotation with one year fallow, whilst the remainder were cultivated less frequently and were outfield.¹³¹ This variability in cropping in different sections at Brandon is illustrated in detail over the period 1366 -1372. In 1366, one quarter of Estfield was sown with oats, the following year the other three quarters were sown with rye, in the third year one quarter was sown with oats, which was followed by three years fallow. Womanlodefield by contrast was part sown in five out of the six years: one half of the field being sown with barley, followed by the other half, also with barley; the next year it lay fallow; the fourth year one half was barley; in the fifth year the whole field was sown with oats and barley; and in the sixth a quarter sown with barley. Drovefield was cropped more heavily – though this is comparative – for at no time over the period 1366 to 1371 was the entire field under crops.¹³²

In 1719, William Proctor's estate of 56 acres at Brandon was widely distributed across ten fields (Table 5.1), a picture that is essentially unchanged from the distribution of holdings in 1566.¹³³ The field names in italics in the table also appear in the 1566 data. Proctor's estate has only a quarter of his parcels in the better quality lands (a further indication of the ratio of infield to outfield lands) given that only Bridith field and Drove field were infield in the 1360s, (see above) and whilst parcels of land did move between in and outfield (see Sedgeford below), there is no evidence for whole fields doing so. There are, obviously, dangers in imposing later evidence onto earlier periods, but the foregoing description is also an indication of a largely unchanging picture over several hundred years.

Table 5.1: Estate of William Proctor in Brandon

FIELD	A. R. P	IN FURLONGS
<i>Bridith</i>	5a 1r 2p	3,4,6,7,8,9,11,13,14
Mamlet	4a 2r	1,2,3,7,9,10
Twohill	4a 0r ½p	1,2,4
<i>Drove</i>	9a 0r ½p	1,2,3,4,10,11
Colorhill	6a 3r	1,2,4,6,7,8,,11
<i>Wiltonhill</i>	5a	1,2,3
Gravel pit	6a 3r	1,2,7,9
<i>Deadhead land</i>	4a	1,3,4
<i>Claypit</i>	5a	1,2,3,6,7
<i>Town</i>	5a 0r ½p	1,4,8,9,10
Total	55a 3r	

¹³¹ Bailey, Marginal Economy, 61

¹³² Campbell, English Seigniorial Agriculture, 296

¹³³ NRO BEA 333/14, 438x7; Bailey, Marginal Economy, 51

The description of Proctor's estate is set out in a letter from a potential lessee who describes the fields of Brandon as divided into ten parts, two of which are under the plough every year in a five-year cycle. One year cropping and four years' fallow is a strong indication of the poverty of much of the region's soils. He goes on - making the most of the poverty of the land to drive down the rent perhaps – to describe two parts of Proctor's land next to the warren as so poor it is ploughed once in every six years; the field land had also not been tathed for some time and the best of it "lay at such a distance, it will be very chargeable to carry muck to it".¹³⁴ The implication is that by the eighteenth century much of the open-field lands at Brandon had 'decayed' to a poor across-the-board average and the best of the medieval infield perhaps enclosed. This had certainly happened at Langford in the Norfolk brecklands where a lease of 1748 for the Hall farm makes clear that the infield land of the farm had been enclosed. The lease further requires that the outfield be divided into five equal shifts or brecks, with only two of them - or 160 acres - to be sown in any one year and to take no more than two crops of corn in succession; following which the breck should be laid down for the flock.¹³⁵

Postgate described most Breckland townships as counting precincts in multiples of three, indicative of a three-course rotation - but one that was adapted to the conditions and employing extended fallowing. At Elveden in 1616 there was a highly organised (by East Anglian standards) system with a three-course crop rotation based on "six shiftes and feldes" (Table 5.2).¹³⁶ In any year there are thus three fields (or shifts) and part of a fourth in fallow and upon which "laye feldes the foldcourse have their contynuall feed". The system at Elveden is not dissimilar to that in operation at Brandon a century later and both represent an 'organised' response to the need to husband the poor quality arable fields; those of Elveden being characterised by Bailey as "islands in a sea of heath".¹³⁷ The 'Elveden' model was not, however, universal, for Breckland contained a number of variants of cropping regimes for which the variable cropping at Brandon in the fourteenth century is a perhaps a better model, and given the relative intensity of the cropping regimes described below, it is safe to assume that they are all related to lands that can be categorised as infield. Lands in Flempton, Hengrave and Lackford (Suffolk) followed a three-course rotation being in 1562 "leaton to ferme" and

¹³⁴ NRO BEA 333/14, 438x7

¹³⁵ NRO PTR 3/9/6

¹³⁶ Postgate, Breckland, 89

¹³⁷ Bailey, Marginal Economy, 44

Table 5.2: Cropping Cycle at Elveden

	SHIFTS AND FIELDS					
YEAR	1	2	3	4	5	6
1	A	B	C	D	D	D
2	B	C	D	D	D	A
3	C	D	D	D	A	B
4	D	D	D	A	B	C
5	D	D	A	B	C	D
6	D	A	B	C	D	D

Key:

A: “newly broken up and sown with wynter corne”

B: “sown with somer corne”

C: “part sown” – presumably in the spring.

D: “lye lay”

divided into three shifts: the first being summerlay, the second and third winter and spring sown crops.¹³⁸ A similar rotation was in operation at Tuddenham (Suffolk) where in 1709 30 acres of arable lands were described as “ten acres in every shift”.¹³⁹ Whilst at Weeting in 1607 the arable open fields were “anciently devided” into five shifts: firstly “to be putt in tylth, followed by rye, barley, oats or barley “or anie other summer grains only” and not with winter corn, and finally “to lie laye for one yeare only to gather harte”. A separate shift called Coxsendeale was sown with barley “two years together”, and the following year part sown then left to lye lay for one year.¹⁴⁰ Four years of cropping – though only spring sown after the first crop – and one-year fallow tends to confirm that the situation of Weeting on the better Newmarket association soils allowed a more intensive regime, perhaps supported by intensive inputs before sowing. Similarly, at Icklingham (Suffolk), in 1730, localised differences in soil quality were ‘catered for’ with separate ‘barley land’ and ‘rye and oats land’ – the former (and more valuable) crop being sown three years in succession followed by two years “summer tilling”; whilst the rye and oats land was cropped for two years then “lay the same three years”.¹⁴¹ The persistence of such differences are further highlighted in the same parish, where in 1854 a four-course rotation was practised but only one sixth of the ‘outshift was cropped

¹³⁸ SROB 449/9/12

¹³⁹ SROB FL 644/11/3.1

¹⁴⁰ NRO MC 2234/65, 943x4

¹⁴¹ Postgate, Breckland, 93

each year.¹⁴² Such lands could easily be pushed to exhaustion: at Croxton (Norfolk), in 1817, there were five courses with three out of the five down to cereals at any one time; the agent, however, considered such a rotation unsuited to the light soils of Breckland.¹⁴³

At Langford, a five shift regime is described in some detail in a letter of 1636 concerning the arable lands which “brecks or shifts...as they come about in their turn or course one is somerlay another winter corne a third barley and a fourth parte or third parte of a fourth shifte after the said two croppes is sown with peas and felches [vetches] for horsemeat”. This makes four courses but the description makes no reference to fallow which is presumably the fifth course. The arable lands of the estate were also divided into two separate sets: that “in Langford...have usually been divided into five brecks or shifts and the arable lands in Stamford and the residual arable lands in Langford and Buckenham on Stanford side have been devided into five other shifts”.¹⁴⁴ Cropping for three or four years implies the land was probably infield. A lease of the Dairy farm at Langford dated 1644 also states that the arable ground at Langford was divided into five courses or shifts but, in this case, the lessee was to plough only three shifts in any year and the other two to be lay.¹⁴⁵ That these requirements are for the benefit of the foldcourse owner is made clear in a further lease of 1652 for Dairy farm which required the lessee not to sow out of course so as “to hinder the ffeede of the sheep belonging to the foldcourse” and to sow no more than two crops together.¹⁴⁶ The restrictions concerning the foldcourse and the reduction to two crops in the second lease suggest that the lease is referring to outfield rather than infield land.

These examples - stretching from the south-west to the north-east corners of the light soil region of western East Anglia - indicate the variability and localised approaches to the cropping of individual furlongs. Overall the general pattern was one whereby the degree of intensity of cropping was related to the soil quality with the longest fallows in areas such as the Brecklands where lands were cropped for a few seasons and then left fallow for several years.¹⁴⁷ The evidence above does cover a wide range of dates, however, the cropping patterns of Norfolk are said to have “exhibited remarkable continuity up until c.1700”.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴² Postgate, *Field Studies*, 301

¹⁴³ Wade Martins & Williamson, *Roots of Change*, 114

¹⁴⁴ NRO PTR 1/123/13, 756X9

¹⁴⁵ NRO PTR 3/9/2

¹⁴⁶ NRO PTR 3/9/3

¹⁴⁷ Campbell, *English Seigniorial Agriculture*, 293

¹⁴⁸ Campbell, *Overton*, 61

4. EXTENDED FALLOWING

As the preceding section has demonstrated, the cropping regimes of western East Anglia in the medieval and early modern periods often included periods of cropping and fallowing that were extended for longer than one year. Superficially, cropping over several years on the light soils appears self-defeating. Intensive inputs as Campbell has described in east Norfolk might be an answer but would they be as effective on the lighter soils, and if the land needed three years to ‘recover’ why push the arable towards exhaustion?¹⁴⁹ And, an obvious but important and neglected question – if the land was of ‘poor’ quality why not crop alternate years?

The common three-course rotation of winter/spring/fallow meant that in any one year approximately 67% of the arable was in tilth and 33% fallow. If the length of the fallow period is increased, the amount of land available for cropping is reduced, presumably to a level that experience suggests is (in a normal year) viable and able to maintain sufficient yields. Many Northamptonshire townships operated a two field system whereby only half the land was under crop in each year.¹⁵⁰ In west Norfolk and Suffolk many townships operated with extended fallows of two years or more which would be equivalent to the Midland two-field system with half the land in fallow at any one time. The rotations were, however, distinctly different in the two regions: in the Midlands there was a regular cycle of cropping and fallow, whilst in west Norfolk and Suffolk the land often lay fallow for extended periods.¹⁵¹ A rotation of crop/fallow meant that each crop was preceded by a year or eighteen months of fallow and preparation prior to being sown. Whereas, in a cycle of winter/spring/ fallow/fallow, whilst the first crop benefited from two years out of tilth the second crop, assuming it was spring sown, had six months or less; and whilst folding would ameliorate the situation, one would think that such a cycle would adversely impact yields.

The relationship between fertility and yield could be addressed by the careful selection of both crops and the sequence of the rotations best suited to the soil conditions. Wheat, which was in theory the most profitable crop was also the most demanding in terms of the nitrogen content of the soil and thus, in the crop rotations was invariably the first crop after the fallow period. It was however unsuited to sandy and acid soils especially when compared to another and much

¹⁴⁹ Campbell, *Agricultural Progress*, 32-35

¹⁵⁰ Hall, *Northamptonshire*, 51

¹⁵¹ Hall, *Open Fields*, 51

hardier bread grain – rye.¹⁵² The variability in the acidity of the soils must have been a particular problem with regard to achieving growth and good yields, given that all of the major grains are acid sensitive; and the pH “below which crops may be expected to fail” are: barley 5.8; wheat 5.3; oats 5.0; rye 4.8.¹⁵³ A gradation emphasised by the situation in Breckland where rye and oats were the predominant crops in the medieval period.¹⁵⁴

There must therefore have been a reason, and perceived benefit, from the use of extended fallows. The manorial lords and those who managed the demesne estates examined by Campbell must have seen advantages in the convertible husbandry that they were practising. In a direct comparison, with regard to crop yields of two light land manors, Bircham - where convertible husbandry was practised - was more productive than Cheriton on the southern edge of the Hampshire downs and which fallowed biennially.¹⁵⁵ The comparison would indicate that Bircham was ‘doing something right’ and whilst both had in effect half their lands fallow at any one time the fixed rotation at Cheriton was not as effective as the three yearly cycle at Bircham.

Clearly the tathing of such extended fallows by cattle and more importantly the flocks of sheep would improve the light soils, in terms of chemical composition - the quantity of nitrogenous materials, phosphates and potassium in the soil. However, given the free draining and often acidic nature of such soils, this cannot be sufficient explanation – the additional nutrients would not accumulate but be washed out of the soil – two years might well be no better or even worse than a single season.

Early agricultural writers also saw potential benefits: Fitzherbert suggested that if arable closes “be worn or wear bare” they should be left to lie whilst [the farmer] should “break and plough up” his leys or pasture closes for corn – advice directed at those with enclosures but still relevant to the principles of extended fallowing.¹⁵⁶ Thirsk also pointed out that late Tudor statutes regarding enclosure “explicitly allowed the temporary conversion of arable to pasture to regain heart”.¹⁵⁷ Similarly, Lisle, in the early eighteenth century, wrote of the “light

¹⁵² Campbell, *English Seigniorial Agriculture*, 218, 220

¹⁵³ Spedding, C. R. W., ed *Freams Agriculture* 16th edition, London, (1983), 345

¹⁵⁴ Bailey, *Marginal Economy*, 138

¹⁵⁵ Campbell, *English Seigniorial Agriculture*, 344,345

¹⁵⁶ Quoted in Thirsk, J., *Tudor Enclosures*, London, (1959), 17

¹⁵⁷ Thirsk, *Tudor Enclosures*, 17

moldering land of the Hampshire hill country as “the ground after a wheaten crop being too loose”.¹⁵⁸ His recommendation was to sow rye grass with wheat to bind the soil; and that “the best husbandry for all light barren ground” was to sow it with rye grass and “so to plough it up to come once in four or five years”.¹⁵⁹ A description that fits closely to the way outfield was managed but applies more generally to extended fallowing.

The potential value of the extended periods of fallow lay, I would suggest, in enhancing crop growth by the improvement of the physical structure of the soils, thus increasing the soils ability to retain moisture and absorb nutrients. An exploration of a number of modern soil science texts offers some reasons underlying those benefits. Such sources need to be treated with caution in relation to an exploration of farm management in the medieval and early modern period – the inherent assumption that artificial fertilisers will be applied for example. However, for issues such as soil structure and the role of organic matter, whilst terminology, analysis and understanding change the underlying problems remain similar; and laboratory measurements “have little more than academic interest, they only confirm the farmer’s qualitative observations that soils drain better and work more easily when fully supplied with organic matter.”¹⁶⁰

The structure of a soil arises from a combination of inorganic materials - such as clay, silt and sand - and organic matter. The structure is important because it controls the flow of air and water through the soil and provides the space for the roots and soil fauna. A poor structure can adversely impact the workability of soils, leading to the loss of water and nutrients, and also erosion.¹⁶¹ The stability of the structure of soils can be maintained by the addition of organic matter or by ley farming.¹⁶² The organic matter, and its role is thus critical in both the formation and stabilisation of soil structure.¹⁶³

The role of organic matter and its effects on soil structure have focussed on arable crops; however, what Cooke characterises as “one of the commonest agricultural observations” is that the structure of the soil “improves under grass and deteriorates under arable cultivation”.¹⁶⁴

¹⁵⁸ OED online ‘loose’: mouldery: crumbly, friable soil

¹⁵⁹ Lisle, E., *Observations in Husbandry*, Farnborough, (1970), 31

¹⁶⁰ Cooke, G. W., *The Control of Soil Fertility*, London, (1967), 443

¹⁶¹ Anon, ‘A Guide to Better Soil Structure’, 4, download 3/7/2013 www.landis.org.uk/downloads/index.cfm

¹⁶² Spedding, 342

¹⁶³ White, R. E., *Principles and Practice of Soil Science*, Oxford, (2006), 52

¹⁶⁴ Cooke, 446

The roots of grass will improve structure by breaking up compacted soils, and in a fine sandy soil, the fine roots will physically bind the particles of sand together to produce “crumb sized aggregates”.¹⁶⁵ Dead roots also add to the stock of organic matter in the soil – in one experiment such matter was increased by about 4 tons per acre after three years under grazed swards, over half of the increase being from grass roots.¹⁶⁶

Organic matter (or humus) in the soil from leys or farmyard manure is also an important component of the ability of any soil to exchange, and more importantly, retain cations such as ammonium and potassium; and in sandy soils or those with a low clay content, will provide the majority of such capacity.¹⁶⁷ Humus will also help to bind water and can absorb and hold up to several times its dry weight.¹⁶⁸ Leys also have “an assured place” in arable crop rotations as a check on soil-borne pests and diseases; and are also beneficial in reducing weed competition.¹⁶⁹ Both of these aspects would have been even more important to arable farming in the medieval and early modern periods - and whilst a one-year fallow would have some benefit, a longer gap between crops would have been more beneficial.

The light soils of East Anglia have been defined as both unstable – that is, the soil structure is less resistant to adverse weather affects compared to clay soils – and slow to recover from cropping.¹⁷⁰ One set of experiments on grass leys, described by Cooke, were performed at Jealotts Hill on sandy loamy over London clay soils.¹⁷¹ These soils are also described as “inherently unstable” and improvements in the structure of the soil from the grass leys “seem to be partly responsible” for the increase in yield. The soils were also said to be in “better physical condition and more workable”. Other benefits from the grass leys (of up to three years) were improved nutrient status, less disease in the subsequent cereal crops and reduced weed competition.¹⁷² It should be noted that the experiments described by Cooke frequently involve materials and methods that were not available to earlier farmers, and those at Jealotts Hill, for example, involved grazed clover leys of one, two or three years that were followed by test crops variously of wheat, barley and kale, with three year continuous arable as a control. The clover

¹⁶⁵ Cooke, 452, 457

¹⁶⁶ Cooke, 452

¹⁶⁷ Cooke, 42; White, 51

¹⁶⁸ White, 52

¹⁶⁹ Cooke, 437, 406

¹⁷⁰ Anon, ‘A Guide to Better Soil Structure’, 5, download 3/7/2013 www.landis.org.uk/downloads/index.cfm

¹⁷¹ Cooke 454

¹⁷² Cooke, 406

was presumably deliberately sown and the grazing was by sheep. The clover was said to be a further factor in the improved yields due to nitrogen fixation together with the sheep excreta.¹⁷³ Undoubtedly sown leys, clover and the use of nitrate fertiliser, albeit at a quarter the rate common in England for continuous arable, will have influenced the quantitative results; but one should not ignore the generalised benefits that arise from improvements in soil structure. It has also been proposed that improvements in soil fertility will in themselves bring about changes in the botanical composition and “favour more productive species such as rye grass, white clover, timothy, cocksfoot and meadow grasses” which will replace inferior species.¹⁷⁴ Four of those named also feature in Ernle’s recipe above (p. 155).

4.1 Some Historical Ecology

The impact of extended fallowing of the infield, outfield and brecks on the growth of vegetation and plant cover on land that was under such a regime in the medieval and early modern period is difficult to recover. This section will employ a modern parallel – set aside – to model how extended fallowing may have ‘worked’ in earlier periods. Weeds, which in this context is any plant that was not a crop - including grasses from the field edge, pasture, baulks, and headlands - were a perennial problem to earlier farmers. The sources of seed in a medieval or early modern agrarian environment must have been more diverse than on arable land nowadays, and the number of seeds greater than we can envisage – as Salisbury put it: weeds are “characterised by a capacity for prolific seed production”; with individual species able to produce from a 1000 seeds to over 200 times that per plant.¹⁷⁵ Attempts to enumerate the seed bank, in agricultural soil in the first quarter of the twentieth century, produced a figure of 68 million dormant weed seeds per acre.¹⁷⁶ Weeds, in the broader sense, may in earlier times have been reduced by weeding, the periods of extended cropping and the number of ploughings, but repeated ploughings of the light soils, given that they would have disrupted the structure of the soil, may have been counter-productive. In addition, as Fox has written, sheep being excellent foragers would have found plenty to feed on given that “medieval croplands were notoriously weed-infested” and harvesting with a sickle left many weeds and grasses standing.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷³ Cooke, 405

¹⁷⁴ Spedding 557

¹⁷⁵ Salisbury, E., *Weeds and Aliens*, London, (1961), 22

¹⁷⁶ Salisbury, 326

¹⁷⁷ Fox, H. S. A., ‘Some Ecological Dimensions of Medieval Field Systems’ in *Archaeological Approaches to Medieval Europe*, ed Biddick, K., Kalamazoo, (1984) 127

The type and nature of vegetational re-growth is dependent on a number of factors: these include the seed ‘bank’; the time since cropping ceased; and the distances between the soil and the seed source.¹⁷⁸ The sources of the seed bank would include those seeds that were dispersed by winds and air currents, those carried by animals, both on their surface, and in their dung – a significant potential source given the importance of manuring and close folding to soil fertility - and those spread by trampling and on vehicles. A further significant source was as a contaminant of the seeds retained as seed corn for the next year.¹⁷⁹ Before modern cleaning equipment, the winnowing and riddling of seed must have been both arduous and time consuming; it was also inefficient at separating out anything other than seeds that were significantly larger or smaller than the corn.¹⁸⁰ In addition, the seeds of many annuals, such as poppy and charlock, can remain dormant in the soil for many years; whilst gorse seeds are viable for twenty five years or more.¹⁸¹ Salisbury also quotes the example of the “vast number of weeds” that appeared when permanent grasslands were ploughed up during the Second World War.¹⁸² Finally, a further source of regrowth is those plants which can re-generate from the buried roots and stems that remained in the soil after ploughing.¹⁸³

It is important, however, to try and understand the ‘speed’ of recovery of land after an extended period of fallow in order to understand how such land might be employed whilst it was fallow. The recent use, in the European Community, of set-aside to take arable land out of cultivation provides some evidence as to what may have occurred in earlier times, and provides a potential resource that has not been previously utilised. Set-aside, which was introduced as a mechanism to reduce the over-production of some commodities and to address the deterioration of the rural environment, began in the UK in the 1988/89 farming year.¹⁸⁴

4.2 The Evidence of “Set Aside”

A survey of farmers who were taking part in the “set-aside” scheme was conducted in 1988/89.¹⁸⁵ Land that was set aside to fallow could be either rotational (i.e. a different area is

¹⁷⁸ Rew, L. J., Wilson, P. J., Froud-Williams, R. J., Boatman, N.D., ‘Changes in Vegetation Composition and Distribution within Set-aside Land’ in *Set-aside*, ed Clarke J, BCPC Farnham, (1992), 79

¹⁷⁹ Salisbury, 97, 102, 106, 111

¹⁸⁰ Salisbury, 118; Wilson, P. J., ‘Britain’s Arable Weeds’, *British Wildlife*, 3, (1992), 151

¹⁸¹ Wilson, 152; Salisbury, 323

¹⁸² Salisbury, 324

¹⁸³ Wilson, 151

¹⁸⁴ Ansell, D. J., Tranter, R. B., *Set-aside in Theory and in Practice*, Reading, (1992), 11

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid*, 12

set aside each year) or permanent. Nationally the latter predominated, but in the eastern region rotational fallow was “relatively much more common”. The authors suggest that this could be due to the region having many arable farms that were used “to carrying out somewhat complicated rotations”; and that given that soil fertility was in decline in the region, a fallow rotation might be a means to restore fertility without recourse to “expensive inputs”.¹⁸⁶ Additionally, the reasons given by some participants who had chosen to follow a rotational fallow included: “restoring the fertility or condition of their soil”; and that it “would help to eliminate” weed problems in their crop - *plus ça change* – indicative of the fact that some problems never disappear.¹⁸⁷

The following will focus on two aspects: firstly, on the natural regeneration of fallow land but will also compare this approach with that of sown set-aside; secondly, on results from light soil lands, where specified - though none are specifically in western East Anglia – together with a comparison of results from heavier soils. The attributes considered are the speed at which ground cover developed, species diversity and the impact of grazing.

An analysis of how rapidly plant cover would develop was conducted on set-aside land on “drought prone loamy sand soil” near Elgin (Scotland). Various plots were cut annually – either in summer or autumn – or left uncut. The results presented were in the fourth year of the trial.¹⁸⁸ Overall, they were variable: at the centre of the field, due to shortage of water, the vegetation was stunted and ‘gappy’; but once rabbits were excluded the height of the vegetation had increased.¹⁸⁹ Growth was affected by the availability of mineral nutrients, and the nearness of the trees. The vegetation of cut and uncut plots was developing in “markedly different” directions, and if not returned to agriculture the uncut plots would in time become woodland.¹⁹⁰ Such an outcome will not however occur on land that was grazed and grazing was to some degree equivalent to the regular cutting carried out on two out of three plots; the effect of grazing is further reinforced by the problems that were caused by the rabbits.¹⁹¹ Grazing has

¹⁸⁶ Ibid, 40

¹⁸⁷ Ibid, 88

¹⁸⁸ Ford, M. A., Lee, K. M., Atkinson, D. A., Wilson, F., ‘Factors Affecting the Plant Cover Developing on Five Year Set-aside at Aldroughy Farm, Elgin’ in *Set-aside*, ed Clarke J, BCPC Farnham, (1992), 111, 112

¹⁸⁹ Ibid, 113

¹⁹⁰ Ibid, 115

¹⁹¹ Ibid, 113

also been characterised as a significant determinant of the course of floral succession, as it produces a more rapid colonisation and the maintenance of a species rich community.¹⁹²

A survey, over three years, was made of 58 set-aside fields left to regenerate naturally in southern England from Dorset to Norfolk. Vegetation cover developed rapidly with 70% cover after one year and circa 95% by years two and three; with close to 60 different species in the first year and 54 by the third year – the high first-year figure being annual weeds.¹⁹³ Similarly, a survey of 40 set aside fields in south and south-east England allowed to regenerate naturally, found a rapid decrease in bare ground.¹⁹⁴ The effects on the conservation of nitrogen were monitored over three years on sandy loam at Woburn (Bedfordshire). Natural regeneration of stubble was found to be “surprisingly effective” at decreasing the loss of nitrogen due to leaching when compared to winter wheat which was used as a control; leaching losses were also significant from ploughed fallow.¹⁹⁵

A recent report on set-aside in both arable and mixed farming systems that surveyed a total of 354 fields concluded that the effects of various soil types “were generally small”.¹⁹⁶ Overall, species richness was greater in the lighter soils, whilst annuals cover was lower in heavy soils. Lighter soils also had a greater cover of grasses and less bare ground than the heavier soils. All of the results indicated that set-aside less than two years old had large amounts of bare ground, the vegetation being predominantly annuals. The latter were succeeded by perennials, particularly grasses (40 – 50%) which dominated older set-aside. The comparison of sown lands and those left to regenerate naturally indicated that sowing resulted (inevitably?) in early domination by grasses. However, “the effects were perhaps not as great as might have been expected”, and the overall difference in species diversity between fields that were sown and those left to regenerate naturally “was relatively small”.¹⁹⁷ Sowing thus “had remarkably little effect on botanical composition especially as the age of set aside increased”.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹² Wilson, P. J., ‘The Natural Regeneration of Vegetation Under Set-aside in Southern England’ in *Set-aside*, ed Clarke J, BCPC Farnham, (1992), 77

¹⁹³ Ibid, 73,74

¹⁹⁴ Rew *et al*, 81

¹⁹⁵ Hewitt, M. V., Webster, C. P., Bacon, E. T. G., ‘The Effect of Cultivation and Plant Establishment on Nitrogen Conservation on Set-aside Land’ in *Set-aside*, ed Clarke J, BCPC Farnham, (1992), 51, 54

¹⁹⁶ Boatman, N., Conyers, S., Jones, N., Pietraville, S., *Botanical Field Survey of Set-aside and Other Uncropped Land: Final Report*, Food and Environment Research Agency, York (2009) 9

¹⁹⁷ Ibid, 83, 82, 23

¹⁹⁸ Ibid, 89

4.3 Discussion

Extended fallowing can be seen to offer a number of benefits in relation to infield arable that, in combination, will bring about a greater effect than a single year in fallow. The principal benefits in the light soil regions of East Anglia arise from an improvement to the physical structure of the soil that would help retain nutrients and moisture. Extended fallowing improves the structure as a result of the roots of grass and other vegetation helping to bind soil particles which are then better able to retain moisture and nutrients. The increase in the period of fallowing becomes in effect an adventitious ley that supplements the grazing resources of the township; which grazing would provide further nutrient resources to the fallow. The retention of moisture was critical, given that eastern England includes some of the driest parts of the country with an annual rainfall of less than 700mm – less than a quarter of the figure for the Lake District.¹⁹⁹ Within the Breckland and Good Sands region the thirty year (1981-2010) rainfall averages for Santon Downham, Marham and Barrow are 665, 652 and 631mm respectively.²⁰⁰ At a more practical level, in 1653 Thomas Thorneley examining a farm at Choseley on behalf of a friend commented that “the water scarce and the well 3 or 4 fadum [fathoms²⁰¹] deepe”, though he went on to recommend it over a farm at Anmer because Choseley was “better corne ground and fyner champ”.²⁰²

The results from the evaluation of set-aside with regard to regeneration of vegetation cover indicate that this could be rapid: as much as 70% after one year – though Boatman *et al* were more cautious in their conclusions – and all such results have to be viewed in the light of the probably better fertility of the soil at the point at which set-aside commenced; against which however is the presence of a larger and more diverse seed bank in earlier times. However, given these caveats the results do provide further evidence of the benefits of extended fallowing. It is also interesting to note the limited benefits of sown set-aside compared to natural regeneration; and whilst the sowing of a designed ley that included legumes such as clover will improve soil fertility, the result with regard to re-growth of a grazing resource by natural regeneration was also good.

¹⁹⁹ www.metoffice.gov.uk/climate/uk/regional-climate/ee downloaded 4/2014

²⁰⁰ www.metoffice.gov.uk/public/weather/climate/santon-downham-norfolk#?tab=climateTables downloaded 4/2014 (and marham-norfolk, barrow-suffolk)

²⁰¹ Yaxley, D., A Researcher's Glossary, Dereham, (2003)

²⁰² NRO NAS 1/1/21/Choseley/9

5. HEATHLAND MANAGEMENT

Norfolk from Thetford to Burnham and along the coast was described by Spelman as a champion district where lay “the barren Heaths [which] are very profitable. For on them lie our foldcourses”.²⁰³ The heaths of the Good Sands region have in many places been ploughed out but survive in patches – as at Massingham and Kipton (Fig 2.6). The lowland heath of Breckland is however of national significance for its heather and grass heaths. These are “best treated as a single complex” where differences in soil conditions “over sometimes quite small distances, result in a mosaic of vegetation types from calcareous to acid grasslands”. Heather may dominate on the acid soils, whilst calcareous grasslands occur at Lakenheath warren and other sites where sheep’s fescue predominates, such as Weeting heath which historically was also a warren and sheep grazing but also periodically turned over to arable – that is used as breck.²⁰⁴

Heaths are a man-made landscape and owe their origins and continued existence to exploitation; primarily “yielding rough grazing...although the carrying capacity...would have been low”.²⁰⁵ Heaths were however more than just an agricultural resource, and were, in earlier times, a valuable social resource - a source of fuel, shelter and fodder which together with grazing maintained the heaths in their ‘un-natural’ state, for they are unstable and liable to rapid successional changes in vegetation, when their former uses cease or change.²⁰⁶ In East Anglia, the common heath species heather is frequently referred to as ling, similarly gorse was called furze or whins.²⁰⁷ Gorse is also, like legumes, able to fix nitrogen from the air as it has nodules containing Rhizobium bacteria.²⁰⁸ The following will examine the ways in which the resources of the heath were traditionally used; the more recent evidence from heathland regeneration as to how the heathland may have developed; and finally how the employment of heathland areas as outfield and breck fits into the overall picture.

²⁰³ Spelman, ‘Norfolke’

²⁰⁴ http://naturalareas.naturalengland.org.uk/Science/natural/NA_HAbDetails.asp3Name=Breckland&N; Gimingham, C. H., *The Lowland Heathland Management Handbook*, Peterborough, (1992), 177

²⁰⁵ Overton, M., *Agricultural Revolution in England*, Cambridge, (1996), 91

²⁰⁶ Gimingham, 11

²⁰⁷ Webb, *Heathlands*, London, (1986), index; Yaxley, D., *A Researcher's Glossary*, Dereham, (2003)

²⁰⁸ Ingrouille, 233

5.1 Traditional Uses of the heathlands

Whilst in East Anglia the lowland heaths were primarily a grazing resource – particularly in Breckland - they had a wide range of other uses. Bracken was employed for animal bedding and thatching.²⁰⁹ Heaths also provided fuel in the form of gorse and bracken and there is a quantity of evidence that they remained a source of fuel until the late eighteenth century at least. The monastery of Our Lady at Thetford, in a dispute in 1500 over common land, reserved to itself of “fyrre lyng and brake growing on Bodney common.”²¹⁰ The inhabitants of Thetford in the early eighteenth century were able to “take furzes” from two areas of heath but only as much as they could carry away “by bundles on their back” - the farmer could however use a cart.²¹¹ As could the lessee of Sedgeford Hall farm in the later seventeenth century who was allowed to take “only ten loads of whins” for his own use, plus two for the shepherd.²¹² On the other side of the county at Aylsham on the north Norfolk heathlands, an exemplification of 1600 in the Duchy court of Lancaster agreed that the copyhold tenants had right to “ffireground, bruerye and moore” on 60 acres of Stonegate heath in the town.²¹³

A Little Cressingham deed of 1759 included the right “to cutting and taking flaggs furze and ffirings...from little Cressingham heath”.²¹⁴ At Garboisthorpe, in 1752, the tenants (30 in total) of the “commonable tenements and cottages...begged the favour” of Sir Thomas Hare, lord of the manor and “owner of all the commons and waste grounds” for permission “to cut flags for their fuel next winter”. The ‘favour’ was granted on condition that the tenants of the commonable tenements cut no more than 2000 flags and those of the cottages half that number. A plea, from 42 tenants of the same type of properties in Shouldham, to cut flags on the east of the commons was also granted with the same conditions.²¹⁵ Similarly at Cockley Cley in 1791 the inhabitants petitioned the manorial lord for permission to cut “flaggs for our necessary firing” from the heath. There were 26 signatories to the petition and they were charged 4d for the privilege. The lord specified that they were to take no more than four cart loads per dwelling and that they were not to “cut dig or stub up any of the whinns” from a specified roadside

²⁰⁹ Webb, 51, Rackham, 295

²¹⁰ NRO PHI 574, 578X3

²¹¹ NRO PTR 4/8, 758X5

²¹² NRO LEST/KA 12, 1

²¹³ NRO NRS 8524, 21B5

²¹⁴ NRO HIL 1/1/165/12, 871X6

²¹⁵ NRO HARE 3147, 202X6

“within the limits marked out by a furrow plowed and posts put down” nor in a particular cover.²¹⁶

The last condition was presumably to preserve the whinns as shelter - for the heathlands (and brecks) were also used to provide shelter for the sheep flocks in winter – for example the sheepwalk of Massingham Priory had about 300 acres “full of bushes, furzes and brakes.”²¹⁷ In order to ensure sufficient cover tenants were prevented from breaking up whin grounds.²¹⁸ It is certainly the case that furzes and whins in the outfields and pastures or heath were encouraged and ‘protected’ in leases. At Sedgeford the West Hall and North Ground farms included coverts and, in the latter case, “liberty of fenn in white weather for succour” of the flock, and a lease or the North foldcourse in 1694 specified that the tenant was “to leave good and sufficient coverts of furzes in the north pastures”.²¹⁹ A breck booke of 1647-1650 for Sedgeford lists three brecks in the North pasture as containing whinn grounds –seven acres in total and a whinn close of 34 acres.²²⁰

5.2 Grazing and Heathland Regeneration

The principal reason for the survival of heathlands over many centuries was their value as a grazing resource; and given that heather is an evergreen, a resource that was available year round.²²¹ Some of its properties also fit into the probable cycle that medieval and early modern flocks would have followed, given that it is resistant to winter grazing whilst most vulnerable to damage due to grazing in the autumn when the flocks would have been on the post-harvest shack.²²² Heather is not, however, an inexhaustible resource: unmanaged it will degenerate and die back over a cycle of 30 or 40 years – a timescale that can be halved on Breckland soils; it is also an unstable resource, being very susceptible to both under and over grazing.²²³

The evidence from recent work on the regeneration of heathland provides some indications of how the heathland may have been used in past times. In particular, grazing “if carefully

²¹⁶ NRO MC 2667/19/3, 991X2

²¹⁷ NRO MS 201417, 126X6

²¹⁸ Whyte, N., *Perceptions of the Norfolk Landscape c 1500-1750*, unpublished thesis, (2005), UEA, 211

²¹⁹ NRO LEST/IB 91; LEST/KA 14, 54

²²⁰ NRO LEST/IB 90, 18, 20, 29, 40

²²¹ Gimingham, 34

²²² Gimingham, 71

²²³ Gimingham, 32, 69

controlled” is an important option for heathland conservation. It removes a proportion of the current year’s growth; and, provided that proportion is not excessive, the plant will respond by producing new growth below the level at which grazing takes place. The heather can thus be maintained in a relatively juvenile growth phase for an extended period.²²⁴ Other authors have described how in areas of low grazing intensity heathers produced “fresh tillers” (plant shoots springing from the roots) and seedlings.²²⁵

A key aspect of the grazing of lowland heaths is both the number of animals involved and the period of time over which they graze the heath.²²⁶ For the maintenance of a “healthy heathland sward”, densities of approximately 1 ewe/hectare in summer and half that in winter are recommended.²²⁷ Gimingham suggests a grazing density of 1 – 2 ewes/hectare/year for grazing throughout the year, with a greater density if the flock is used for part of the year only.²²⁸ These levels are described as being predominantly aimed at reducing the impact of over-stocking.²²⁹

All of the above is written within the context of “the maintenance of a vigorous heather stand”.²³⁰ Webb, however, suggests that large areas of heather are probably unrepresentative of heaths in earlier periods when they were subject to regular grazing which would have produced a more diverse vegetation and one that was richer in the proportion of grasses.²³¹ This is confirmed by the monitoring of heathland and pasture in the Netherlands where the diversity of vegetation was found to correlate with the intensity of grazing. In areas of low grazing intensity heathers predominated, whereas grasses became dominant in areas of greater intensity.²³² The same results were obtained on British uplands where “fragmentation of heather and conversion to grass under heavy grazing is a widespread phenomenon”; and the same positive correlation between the intensity of grazing and the proportion of grassland is also recorded by English Nature.²³³

²²⁴ Gimingham, 40

²²⁵ Bakker, J., De Bies, S., Dallinga, J., Tjaden, P., De Vries, Y., ‘Sheep Grazing as a Management Tool for Heathland Conservation and Regeneration in the Netherlands’, *J of Applied Ecology*, 20 (1983), 555

²²⁶ Lake, S., Bullock, J. M., Hartley, S., *Impacts of Livestock Grazing on Lowland Heathland in the UK*, English Nature Research Report 422, Peterborough, (2001) 41

²²⁷ Ibid, 42

²²⁸ Gimingham, 72

²²⁹ Lake *et al*, 42

²³⁰ Gimingham, 69

²³¹ Webb, 47

²³² Bakker *et al*, 555

²³³ Hester, A. J., Baillie, G. T., ‘Spatial and Temporal Patterns of Heather Use by Sheep and Red Deer within Natural Heather/Grass Mosaics’, *J Applied Ecology*, 35,5 (1998), 722; Lake *et al*, 43

The average stocking density in the Dutch experiments was 3 sheep/hectare, which is similar to English Nature's suggestion that a maximum of 2.7 sheep/hectare is considered the limit above which Calluna heath will become grassland.²³⁴ The Dutch authors also suggest that the impact of the higher stocking density could be ameliorated by reducing the number of sheep, or folding the sheep at night in order to concentrate the dunging in one location and reduce the overall soil nutrient levels - or, of course, move the sheep off the heath at night.²³⁵ Historical data on stocking density is available for a number of locations. At Lakenheath warren, which covered 930ha the numbers of sheep varied between 1/ha in the early medieval period and 2/ha by the thirteenth century.²³⁶ In the latter period the warren provided grazing for "about 2200" sheep.²³⁷ On 660 acres of the Suffolk Sandlings in 1770, there was a similar density with 1.3 sheep/ha. Densities thus likely to maintain the land as heather heath.²³⁸

5.3 Outfield and Brecks

Unlike either the infield or the permanent heathland, the brecks or outfield occupied a shifting role between the two, undergoing a repeating cycle of ploughing, cropping and fallow – as at Sedgeford where three years of cropping was followed by four years fallow (below p. 244) – or Lakenheath warren where there is archaeological evidence of land being occasionally brought into tilth.²³⁹ Given their use as outfield or breck, the soils employed as such were presumably poorer than the infield discussed above. The differences could however be marginal – land was moved between the two types on occasions, as at Sedgeford in the mid seventeenth century when "John Ellgar hath layd out of the infield into the second breck six roods and lands taken from the East Brecks layd infield".²⁴⁰ Therefore some of the evidence above drawn from the analysis of set-aside with regard to the benefits of extended fallowing is also applicable to the outfield, which rather than supporting a heath-like vegetation may have been a more diverse, grassier environment.

²³⁴ Bakker *et al*, 542; Lake *et al*, 42

²³⁵ Bakker *et al*, 555

²³⁶ Crompton, G., Sheail, J., 'The Historical Ecology of Lakenheath Warren: A Case Study' *Biological Conservation*, 8, (1975), 300

²³⁷ Ibid, 302

²³⁸ Lake *et al*, 17

²³⁹ Crompton, *et al*, 308

²⁴⁰ NRO LEST/IB 90, 14, 31

The balance between gain and loss of nutrients is difficult to assess but, whilst cropping will have reduced the quantity of nutrients, those nutrients were to some degree at least replenished by post-harvest shack and casual grazing. Additionally, there are weeds that can fix nitrogen; one such is Hare's foot clover which can be "quite common" in sandy fields.²⁴¹ Each breck was not large – typically c.70 acres at Sedgeford - and with 600 sheep in the foldcourse, the density of grazing over three sown brecks, post-harvest, would have been c.7/ha for periods of grazing (not folding) – significantly higher than the figures above and likely to increase the development of a grassland environment.

In addition, on the Lestrange estates at least, by the late seventeenth century the brecks were being deliberately tathed; for example, the tenant of Sedgeford West Hall Farm, in 1701 was required to tathe "as much breckland in the last year as can be compassed with 500 sheep in a fold (see also section 10 below).²⁴² The importance of tathing the brecks (with the cart in this case) is further emphasised by a note of 1647-1650 which says that "because Robert Birch...lefft short of the muck of that he ought to leave" the sixth breck which should be summerly in 1653 was to be replaced by another and the sixth breck would be summerly in 1654.²⁴³ The size of the potential seed bank was, as with the infield, large and whilst repeated ploughing will have reduced the quantity in the plough soil there were further sources nearby. At Sedgeford, a map of 1631 indicates that those brecks that were in tilth in any one year were not in a block, rather that sown and fallow brecks tend to lie alongside each other. This may have facilitated the exchange process discussed in the next chapter, but does also provide a nearby further source of seed to promote growth on the fallow.²⁴⁴

Webb's suggestion of a more diverse, grassier sward can therefore be applied with some confidence to the brecks. The principal outcome of which would be a more varied and better feed for the sheep, given that grasses are more digestible than heather, the latter being fibrous, high in tannins and having a low digestibility.²⁴⁵ The impact of the development of a grassier sward on the brecks may also lie behind the way in which the heathland elements - furze and whins - were protected in leases.

²⁴¹ Salisbury, 249

²⁴² NRO LEST/KA 14, 51,53

²⁴³ NRO LEST/IB 90

²⁴⁴ NRO LEST/ OC1

²⁴⁵ Armstrong, H, 'The grazing behaviour of large herbivores in the uplands', 2 <http://www.snh.org.uk/publications/on-line/advisorynotes/47/47htm> downloaded Feb.2014

5.4 Discussion

With regard to the brecks or outfield, the first and perhaps obvious comment to make is that the taking of regular portions of heath into temporary cultivation was a long-lived and successful agrarian practice; otherwise it would not have survived as long as it did. The issue was the need to manage the process in order to maintain both intakes and permanent pasture.

Heathland vegetation can be restored from the seed bank in fields that were formed from heathland and subsequently abandoned. The methods commonly employed to achieve such a change include mowing, rotavation and grazing; by which means ericaceous seeds are exposed and encouraged to germinate; and heather seeds sown on exposed soil can germinate in the same year as they are sown.²⁴⁶ Such techniques are little different to how the outfield and brecks were treated in earlier times - given that they were regularly ploughed and grazed whilst in tilth.

It is impossible to be certain of the balance of nutritive value in the soil of the brecks and how depleted it would have been at the end of each cropping cycle; or in effect the balance between a heathland vegetation and one that was botanically more diverse. The evidence above indicates that the brecks were not left in a 'steady state' but actively managed to maintain or improve their value both as a unit of cropping but also sheep feed. This outcome may explain in part the 'generosity' of manorial lords in compensating tenants when their lands in the brecks were under extended fallow, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

²⁴⁶ Webb, 198; www.moorlandassociation.org/reseeding.asp downloaded Feb 2014

CHAPTER 6: THE ROLE AND IMPORTANCE OF THE FOLDCOURSE IN THE FARMING REGIME

The previous chapter examined the relationship between the foldcourse and the farming systems within which it operated. In this chapter I intend to take this another step forward, focusing on the foldcourse itself. In the first section I will explore further the tenurial aspects of the foldcourse, including a discussion on the distinctions between foldcourse rights and those of common and shackle and their impact, the role of cullet flocks, and the 'ownership' of the tathe. I will also examine the 'peculiar' and perhaps unique role played by temporary land exchanges between lords and tenants in relation to the foldcourse. This is followed by a discussion of the topography of the foldcourse and its relationship with the outfields or brecks, under their various guises. The final part consists of an exploration of the diversity of the foldcourse in relation to townships with extensive areas of grazing such as marsh and fen, or on the borders of the light soil region; and the presence of foldcourses in south Cambridgeshire.

The final section will examine the integration of farming and the foldcourse, including a discussion on the balance between sheep and corn, and the development of sheep-corn husbandry in the Early Modern period focussing in particular on the Lestrange estates in north-west Norfolk. The final part is an attempt to describe how the flock and the fold were managed and integrated into the farming year.

1. TENURIAL ASPECTS OF THE FOLDCOURSE

The foldcourse was a manorial right, the possession of which, as I examined in the previous chapter, was not automatic. The foldcourse right was not simple and in this section I intend to unpick the various elements that have been seen as part of the foldcourse in order to understand them better. These elements are: the interaction of foldcourse, shack and common rights; cullet flocks, ownership of the tathe; and compensation and exchanges.

1.1 Foldcourse, Shack and Common Rights

The foldcourse was constituted of two overlapping rights – the foldcourse itself and the right of grazing on the post-harvest shack. The latter, as Allison wrote, was the term employed for the feed available to both the flock and the tenants' great beasts (principally horses, cows and bullocks) on the post-harvest stubbles and all tenants normally had a right of shackage during the shack period which was commonly from Michaelmas (29th September) to the feast of the Annunciation (25th March) but could vary depending upon weather, crops and local customs.¹ The feeding of animals on the post-harvest stubble was not, however, a concomitant of the foldcourse alone but an essential feature of almost all open-field systems.² There are a number of documents that, to varying degrees, make a clear distinction both temporally and spatially between shackage and the foldcourse.

At Great Ringstead, prior to 1650, there were two foldcourses with 800 sheep in each. Hamon le Strange had 400 sheep in each foldcourse based on “his right to depasture all the sheep pasture lands (i.e. the brecks) and liberty of shack on the infield”.³ Similarly, a survey of Emhowes manor at East Walton in 1593 states that Thomas Baker held the liberty of shack of the fields of East Walton together with a liberty of foldcourse.⁴ Whilst at East Lexham and Dunham an exemplification of a chancery decree of 1615 concerning a foldcourse refers to the shack and winterfeed for the sheep...in the field and arable ground...from Michaelmas to Lady Day (25th March) every year “as the same hath bin used and fedd within the memory of man”.⁵ A 1613 lease for the Felbrigg foldcourse describes the property as “the foldcourse or sheep

¹ Allison, *Sheep-corn Husbandry*, 19

² Thirsk, *Common Fields*, 10

³ NRO LEST/FF 2, 1

⁴ NRO BIR 27, 396x7, 11

⁵ NRO KL/C 56/27

pasture...in...heathes or heath grounds [in] Felbrigg, Aylmerton and Cromer together with all such shackle...within the feildes of Felbrigg and Aylmerton”.⁶

Similarly at Titchwell on the north-west coast of Norfolk, Magdalene College and their farmers had the “liberty of 800 sheep in foldcourse in [th]e brecks...at all times of the year and also in infield lands in every year from 29th September to 25th March”.⁷ In a separate entry this liberty of shack also included the Lord’s horses and cattle; and the entry continues “if the lord overstock which he may doe he may eatt outt [th]e tenants” – whether this is describing a risk to be avoided or something the lord may do is perhaps unclear.⁸

At Hilborough the foldcourse rights were set out more specifically in 1768 in a document connected with the parliamentary enclosure of the parish. It states that the flock “feed upon the heath and wastes at all times of the year as well as such parts of the breaks as are not sown also upon two of the outfields viz one that is laid to grass and one that is fallow. The infield lands are fed by the sheep from Michaelmas to Lady Day”, and this ‘feeding’ is referred to as shackage.⁹ During the enclosure of the parish, the manorial lord proposed at one point to go to court “to oblige the tenants and owners” to explain “by what right they do take common and shack”; and that “shack was peculiar to Norfolk.”¹⁰ It was not - being employed in Suffolk and Cambridgeshire - and the concept certainly was not.¹¹ Shack rights as a separate entity were recognised by the commissioners responsible for Parliamentary enclosures. At Grimston, in 1780, Philip Case received awards for his eleven rights of shackage, separate to the thirteen parcels in lieu of his right of sheepwalk or foldcourse.¹²

This distinction between shackage and foldcourse, which has not been previously discussed, is an important one - creating two zones of custom, right and dispute. The distinction also circumscribed the manorial rights and a foldcourse was not therefore a ‘cover-all’ right to feed over all the manorial and tenant lands at will – much as flockmasters may have tried to do so, abusing customs and other rights such as shack in the process. In Chapter One I discussed a number of examples of the arguments that were prevalent - particularly in the sixteenth century.

⁶ NRO WKC 5/85, 400x3

⁷ NRO MC 1256/1, 808x4, 57

⁸ NRO MC 1256/1, 808x4, 101

⁹ NRO HIL 3/16/21

¹⁰ NRO HIL 3/24, 879x1; HIL 3/31/1, 879x2

¹¹ OED online: quoted examples are predominantly East Anglian; Bailey, *Marginal Economy*, 66

¹² NRO C/Sce 1/2, 199

The majority of disputes between lords and tenants concerned the arable and were thus related to shackle. These included, whether the lord's flock could feed in enclosures, the flock feeding over land that had been sown with winter corn and extending the period of shack.

The description of shack above is an ideal and there are a number of examples where the practice (particularly of the right of the flock to take precedence over the great cattle) favoured the lord over the tenants. In medieval Breckland, the shack was generally grazed by both cattle and sheep, though in some townships the lord's flocks had first 'bite'; and at the end of the shack period the grazing was restricted to the flocks of the foldcourse owners.¹³ Given that the commonest date for the end of shack was 25th March which would be around the time of preparation for the spring sowing, this last proviso was of value only on land left in fallow or where the shack period was shorter – as at Dersingham where it closed on 25th December.¹⁴

The arguments also spilled over into disputes over common rights, with lords accused of overstocking or enclosing commons.¹⁵ The exclusion of all but the lord's flock from shackle and the restriction of the tenant's common rights were increasingly common in the sixteenth century as illustrated in a dispute at Shernborne. The following is taken from a transcript, described as "a true copy" of the judgement of Francis Gawdy (1596/7), included in a field book of 1727 and the underlining appears in the text. The dispute concerned common rights and ploughing up of a common of 300 acres. The judgement stated that "the inhabitants in every antient messuage shall...have common of pasture for...horses beasts and great cattle...within Shernborne common ling from...the end of harvest or the beginning of common shackle untill the feast of the Nativity of our Lord...as they have used to do by their antient custom" but not at any other time of the year. The judgement also stated that the Lord and his farmers could not "feed [the common] with any of their great cattle other...than plough horses in the time of shack".¹⁶ The judgement in effect divided the lands to be shackled between the lord who by implication had the post-harvest shack, whilst the tenants' animals were restricted to the common ling – the value of the feed from which may have been poor, especially if the sheep had depastured there during the summer. The underlining is also a reminder that the rights were only 'common' to those who held certain messuages. With regard to the ploughing

¹³ Bailey, *Marginal Economy*, 77, 78

¹⁴ NRO MC 40/55, 485x7

¹⁵ Allison, *Sheep-Corn Husbandry*, 23

¹⁶ NRO MC 40/55, 485x7

of the common, the judgement was that the lord was not “at any time [to] ditch or inclose plow or sow any part of the common” ...nor take away any of the firings “without the consent of the inhabitants”.¹⁷ A similar agreement concerning the shack rights and the division of the commons, was made at Ringstead (p 241).

The exclusion of tenants from the post-harvest shack, as opposed to rights over the common or heaths occurred at a number of locations. At Hilborough the commoners had, until 1635, an “interest demand and claim” for commonage and shack upon “all the warren commons and severalls”; which was in that year replaced by an agreement in which 400 acres of common called Hollow and Field Bushes...and a piece of the warren” was to be for their great cattle.¹⁸ At East Wretham an eighteenth-century terrier describes two sheepwalks: one on Ringmere heath that was common from 1st August to 1st November; and another, Lodge heath that was common for great cattle all the year. There were also two sets of brecks that were similarly distinguished: one again being common from 1st August to 1st November except when sown with corn; the second set being always common and subject to the same exception.¹⁹ At Anmer, however, the ‘traditional’ arrangements survived: in 1783, those holding a “Common Right Messuage” still had access to the shackage being entitled to “firing feed of neat beasts and horses on the common...also to shackage with their neat beasts horses and swine over the common fields”.²⁰

Excepting Anmer these examples all represent a division of lands – be they infield, outfield or heaths – into areas of control and exclusivity. They also in effect represent the ‘acceptance’ of the replacement of customary rights by agreements with the manorial lord.²¹ At a functional level the identification of defined areas for the tenants’ cattle and other beasts may also have been a benefit for the tenants, given that the value of both common and shack rights over the arable when the sheep got first bite, and over the commons or heaths is doubtful. In the case of the arable, what would have been left after the sheep, given that they are able to eat the stubble to virtually ground level?²² As to the common - at Bircham Magna in 1638 the high common ling ground of 700 acres was described as an area “of which the towne hath no profit but a few

¹⁷ NRO MC 40/55, 485x7

¹⁸ NRO HIL 3/16/1

¹⁹ NRO MS 10071

²⁰ NRO MC 40/64/12, 485x7

²¹ Whyte, 198

²² Ault, 46

short brakes and grauing of flaggs”; the shack for great cattle was of “little worth” because of the foldcourses (there were four for 1900 sheep) “have libertie upon it and feede all the yeare”. Similar comments were also made about the commons of Bircham Newton and Fring.²³

1.2 The Foldcourse and Cullet Flocks

There are two other elements of any foldcourse related to tenure which need to be discussed: the cullet – the right of tenants to keep sheep in the foldcourse - and the ‘ownership’ of the tathe. In many locations it is clear that some tenants had the right to keep sheep in the foldcourse. This right was attached to properties and was commonly known as a cullet, or in some places a trippe, and as such was always at risk due to engrossment by manorial lords; as will be discussed later. Allison suggested that cullet rights were limited to freeholders, and such examples may represent the survival of free folds from the medieval period, or were part of a property right.²⁴ By the sixteenth century, in the sheep-corn region of Norfolk, the diverging interests of landlords and tenants had led to many landlords, with their increasing focus on sheep farming to lease out their demesne land whilst retaining the foldcourse.²⁵ This rather glosses over the practicalities of grazing the flock whilst leasing the demesne arable; but elsewhere Allison suggests that, whilst some flockmasters rented foldcourses, “in most cases” they were on the lord’s own manors which would bring the interactions of arable, grazing and folding within his control.²⁶ Thomas Lestrange, for example, who had eight foldcourses in 1534, had his sheep on only half of them; and leasing the foldcourse became increasingly common in the next century – at Titchwell and Sedgeford for example below.²⁷

In Breckland the increasing interest of the landlords in their flocks led to the development of a more rigid foldcourse system with the consequence that, by the late sixteenth century, the numbers of sheep had significantly increased, predominantly in the flocks of the manorial lords; and the rearing of sheep “had dwindled to the point of extinction on many peasant holdings”.²⁸ However, foldcourse arrangements followed no one pattern; and, as Bailey cautions, one “should resist attempts to describe the foldcourse...as if it operated in some

²³ NRO LEST/L8/3,4,6

²⁴ Allison, *Sheep-Corn Husbandry*, 24

²⁵ Allison, *Sheep-Corn Husbandry*, 22

²⁶ Allison, *Flock Management*, 110

²⁷ Oestmann, 145

²⁸ Bailey, *Medieval Suffolk*, 45, 216

standardised form” across the region.²⁹ Certainly peasant sheep farming in the form of cullet rights co-existed with manorial flocks in a number of townships in the Good Sands country and their extinction through engrossment was a much more drawn-out process - tenant flocks surviving well into the eighteenth century.

At Great Ringstead the tenants had 300 sheep in each of the township’s two folds until these rights were changed in 1650 – see below.³⁰ At Holme the tenants and manorial lord each had 300 sheep in the foldcourse, whilst at Kelling and Salhouse in 1551, it was agreed that the freeholders and tenants were to have 500 sheep “to be put fed and agisted yearly within” the Lord’s flocks.³¹

The tithe accounts for Little Cressingham (1626-1647) also indicate a more diverse pattern of sheep keeping than the “flockmaster model” might suggest. In 1633/4 Thomas Ashley was tithed for the wool of fourteen sheep which were “depastured 3 quarters of a year in Cressingham”. In the following year he paid 6s for 40 sheep depastured for 9 months in the parish. Some villagers who were tithed on flocks in the hundreds may have been lessees of a foldcourse; but others were tithed for lambs or wool on small numbers – such as Widow Crane one lamb of fourteen, or Richard Balleston and Mr. Carlin for tithe wool of seven and eighteen sheep respectively.³² In the neighbouring township of Great Cressingham a field book of 1646 includes a note that the tenants “have heard that there is or have been...a trippe of sheep to be yearly kept within the bounds of the said foldcourse...the number of which they remember not.”³³

According to the survey of 1627, the tenants of Hilborough had “a trippe of shepe [320] in lieu of the damage done to them...by the Lords conies and warren” which they held “by the favour and graunt of the lord”.³⁴ The estate was purchased by James Nelthorpe in 1719 and in 1723 the rector Edmund Wace brought a case against Nelthorpe and his tenant, on behalf of himself and other freeholders, to protect their cullet rights of approximately 390 sheep - the tenants claiming that Nelthorpe had driven their sheep off of the fields and commons and brought an

²⁹ Bailey, *Sand into Gold*, 55

³⁰ NRO LEST/ FF 2

³¹ NRO LEST/P 20, 98; NRO MC 1859/48, 861x4, 6

³² NRO MC 1044/1, 802x6

³³ NRO DCN 52/10, 78

³⁴ NRO HIL 2/41, 882x6

action of trespass against them.³⁵ They further claimed that the cullet rights were by “custom prescription or usage time out of mind and not merely by the favour of and grant of the lord of the manor and that the survey of 1627 was a forgery.”³⁶ Various aged witnesses testified that there had long been a cullet flock; one of whom (Luke Ward) claimed that he had heard “old Widow Hey say that her father’s father had reported that the cullet sheep were once a flock called the town flock” and that there was “often falling out” with the Townshends about the tathe until it was agreed to “put all to [th]e lord’s flock as now they go”.³⁷ The case was decided in the tenants’ favour, with their “severall and respective cullet rights...be established”; but was a mere hiccup in the steady engrossment of the estate.³⁸ By 1763, Nelthorpe and then Ralph Cauldwell who had purchased Hilborough from him had acquired many of the properties in the town, including all the separate cullet rights except that of the rectory.³⁹

It is unlikely that the Hilborough town flock was unique, and such a separate flock consisting of the sheep of those with liberty of fold, or with a right to keep sheep that was attached to their holding, or who thought they had such a right, was perhaps more common. One can equally see why the manorial lords would be keen to eliminate such beasts, or deny their right to feed especially if the tathe was not within their control.

The persistence and survival of cullet rights represent the survival of those small estates of which they were part, and the possession of the right increased the value of the property, given the desire of lords to buy up the rights. The right usually came at a cost: tenants having to contribute towards the shepherd’s wages - at Kelling and Salthouse, in 1551, 2d for each ewe and 1½d for “every one being no ewe”, at Ringstead in 1650 also 2d per sheep, and at Holme, in 1674, their yearly contribution was 4d per sheep.⁴⁰ At Hilborough, however, the tenants did not have to contribute to the shepherd’s wages.⁴¹ There is no evidence that they gained preferential treatment over those tenants without sheep - unless they perhaps for part of the year kept their small flock within their own messuage or closes. However, exercising a right of putting perhaps a score of sheep in the manorial flock and getting the benefit of a fold of say 500 sheep - even after paying for the benefit - was probably a better deal than trying to buck

³⁵ NRO HIL 3/12, 879x1, 1; HIL 3/12, 879x1, 6; HIL 3/12, 879x1, 20

³⁶ NRO HIL 3/12, 879x1, 28

³⁷ NRO HIL 3/13/5, 879x9

³⁸ NRO HIL 3/11, 879x1, 105

³⁹ NRO HIL 3/16/13 & 34

⁴⁰ NRO MC 1859/48, 861x4; LEST/ FF2, 6; LEST/ P 20, 98

⁴¹ NRO HIL 3/12, 879x1, 8

custom, keep your own separate small flock, feed and care for them - and how much benefit could be got from a fold of twenty sheep?

1.3 The Tatthe

The purpose of the foldcourse was to utilise the sheep to transfer nutrients from pasture to arable by means of the fold. It is implicit in all of the arrangements of the foldcourse that the tatthe was the property of the lord. Direct evidence to that effect is scarce; or as Simpson expressed it “there is less evidence than one might expect” and he relied on the fact that the tatthe was in effect purchased by the tenants, to demonstrate ownership.⁴²

There are, however, a few clear statements that confirm the lord as owner – though of early modern date. An attorney, writing to Sir Christopher Calthorpe concerning disagreements over the latter’s foldcourse at Holme in 1674, states that “the privileges of the lord as owners of the foldcourse...confirmed namely...the benefit of the tatthe according to the custom of all foldcourses”.⁴³ In addition an account of lands at West Wretham of 1741 makes it clear that the tatthe of a cullet flock is also the lord’s - referring to “one tripp or liberty of 200 ewes belonging to George Prettyman [and] 3 score ewes belonging to the parsonage” the tatthe of which “is to be bestowed every year upon the lands of the lord only”.⁴⁴ Also, in the case of cullet rights at Hilborough the tenants agreed that the benefit of the tatthe was the lord’s.⁴⁵

However, whilst the lord may have had a monopoly of the tatthe, he had to realize that monopoly to obtain any benefit or profit. Originally, with the demesne lands farmed in-hand, this would have been by folding his flock over the demesne arable; which fold could be restricted to the lord’s lands and not those of the tenants. In practice, this must have been difficult if not impossible given that holdings were not ‘clustered’ but relatively widely scattered. Could shepherds have separated off the demesne strips with hurdles? The number of hurdles needed and the practicality of controlling the movement from one strip to the next makes it seem unlikely. The leasing out of demesnes would make little difference to those practical difficulties. Such difficulties would have been a further incentive to the re-organisation of the

⁴² Simpson, *The Foldcourse: Some Queries*, 90

⁴³ NRO LEST/P 20, 98

⁴⁴ NRO NRS 18019, 41 C 7

⁴⁵ NRO HIL 3/12, 879x1, 8

arable into blocks or shifts which would have made the task of folding easier, but the separation of demesne and tenants' lands remained an issue – it could however be done (see Titchwell below). In practice, the fold included tenant's lands and they, as both Allison and Simpson surmised, paid for the 'privilege'.⁴⁶ In Breckland at least, Bailey suggests that both authors are correct and that, depending on location demesne flocks either tathed all of the open fields or the demesne arable only.⁴⁷ It is unclear whether the tenants had, in reality, any choice in the matter; if they did, and refused to pay - the problem of separating off parcels of land with hurdles re-occurs – an activity the 'un-co-operative' tenant would almost certainly have had to pay for. Numbers of leases make clear the requirement to sow in course, though not doing so would be clearly a useful device to disrupt the smooth operation of the flock.⁴⁸

The value of the tathe appears variable; at Coney Weston it was 12d per acre but double that at Fornham in the 1340s.⁴⁹ At Stiffkey the price for tathing an acre was 16d "after the olde custome...but worth more."⁵⁰ The tenants at Sedgford and Hindringham in the last decade of the fifteenth century were paying 12d per acre for the tathing of their land; whilst at Ringstead 150 years later, the Lestrangle tenants were paying the same for tathing of the brecks they had in tilth.⁵¹ Given inflationary pressures this seems generous of the lord concerned, but he clearly made a distinction between different customers. The tenants paid 12d/acre and could also buy 'extra' tathe, however, in 1649 "Bardolfs fearmours" (Bardolfs being another manor in the township⁵²) paid 2s 4d per acre for tathe, and Philip Loades was charged 2s.⁵³ The organisation of the folding was presumably arranged between the shepherds and the tenants; and a lease for a farm at Merton in 1690 makes clear that the tathing will be "in such manner as the shephard for the time being shall think fitt".⁵⁴

⁴⁶ Allison, *Sheep-corn Husbandry*, 20

⁴⁷ Bailey, *Sand into Gold*, 44

⁴⁸ NRO LEST/P 20, 98; LEST/FH 3

⁴⁹ Bailey, *Marginal Economy*, 81

⁵⁰ Bacon Papers, 1, 48

⁵¹ Bailey, M., 'The Sheep Accounts of Norwich Cathedral Priory 1484-1534' *Poverty and Wealth*, Norfolk Record Society, 71, 2007, 36, 37, 42, 43

⁵² Blomefield, 10, 341

⁵³ NRO LEST/L 9

⁵⁴ NRO WLS VI/2/3, 408x2

At Titchwell, the lord's ownership of the tathe was the subject of dispute - for "the lord had all [th]e tathing all [th]e time [and it was the] Lord's right to keep tathe".⁵⁵ According to one witness recorded by Sir Thomas Sclater it was the custom for the occupiers of the foldcourse "to pitch and fold and tath [th]e breck lands of the lord...[and] to tath none of the tenant's lands there".⁵⁶ The lands must therefore have been divided with hurdles. This was, however, breck not infield and whilst there is no full field survey for Titchwell, the Lord did hold 338 acres (70%) of the breckland.⁵⁷ Such concentration of breckland in manorial hands was not unusual – see for example Ringstead and Sedgeford (below). Not surprisingly, the tenants were also "unwilling to putt sheep into [th]e flock in exchange for their break lands because the tathe is all [th]e lords". The tenants do, however, appear to have purchased or at least known the price of the tathe; but they apparently reckoned the tathe not good value with single tathing 3s per acre compared to dunging at 1s 4d per acre. The writer reckoned tathing was better value - but he was the one who profited from the sale.⁵⁸

1.4 Foldcourse Compensation and Exchanges

One of the unusual features of the foldcourse regime that Allison identified was the compensation that tenants received when their lands lay in the fallow shift. This compensation took the form of either demesne land in exchange, a reduced rent or an increase in the tenant's cullet rights. He reasoned that the compensation was due to the holdings of the tenants being clustered, as a result of which, in certain years, a significant proportion of their land would be fallow and the compensation being for his inability to utilise those strips.⁵⁹ Evidence, however, suggests that holdings were not clustered but were irregularly distributed across numbers of furlongs in the township; in addition, the system of shifts had by necessity to be formed from blocks of land. In common-field systems with field-based rotations and a regular distribution of holdings a tenant would expect, in a three-course rotation, for one third of his land to be in fallow each year; and there is no evidence that they were compensated for what was the normal part of the agrarian cycle. It is clear, however, that tenants in some Norfolk townships were receiving payments in one form or another for their land when it was not 'available' to them – but why and for what were they being compensated?

⁵⁵ NRO MC 1256/1, 808x8, 56

⁵⁶ Ibid, 58

⁵⁷ Ibid, 53

⁵⁸ Ibid, 105

⁵⁹ Allison, Sheep-corn Husbandry, 20

Allison quotes examples of compensation from Sedgeford and Hindringham. At the latter, tenants “were obliged to give up lands in the summer pasture of a foldcourse” and were compensated with land or 8d per acre.⁶⁰ Was the ‘summer pasture’ therefore a sheep pasture? Hindringham did have outfields – in 1739 an account taken from a field book makes several references to “here [th]e brecks begin” or end.⁶¹ This example thus indicates a connection with infield-outfield cultivation, and the examples below confirm this association and more specifically at times when parts of the outfield were reserved for the sheep. Simpson suggested that there was a further example of the exchange of lands as compensation in a 1594 survey of Thomas Fauconer’s lands in Helhoughton.⁶² The survey, in a fashion similar to Skayman, details an exchange of 17 parcels of land (33 acres) “newly laied for the ladies course in the north field” for 19 acres in 15 parcels of “land laid out of old; an arrangement described subsequently as “suma of all the land w[hi]ch the Lady hathe in exchanges of the said ffauconer.”⁶³

An indenture of 1600/01 at Sedgeford states that Richard Stubbe (who held the foldcourse) “shall lay out and appoint unto the said Bird [a copyhold tenant] ...so much of Stubbes lands...in exchange for the same as...Stubbe...shall have of [Bird’s lands in] the sheeps pastures during such time [as Bird’s land] shall lye for the pasture and feed of the foldcourse”.⁶⁴ A Parliamentary survey of 1649 of the same township states that “where it falls out [of] course that any of the copyhold or freehold land are to lye long for the purpose aforesaid the lord allows his tenants in exchange and recompense for [th]e same a like quantity of his demesne arable lands”. The ‘aforesaid’ in this case is not part of a regular crop rotation but, given that the land is to “lye long for the pasture of the said sheep” it is referring to land in the outfield.⁶⁵ The brecks at Sedgeford were divided into three (north, south, east) and each then divided into eight, five of which “lay for sheep”.⁶⁶ The arrangements are made even clearer in a Breche book of 1631 which describes in detail the management of the lands in Sedgeford by Hamon Lestrange and outlines an eight-year cycle for each section of the brecks, in which for four years at a time the land was not cropped.⁶⁷ It also sets out how the exchanges of lands in the

⁶⁰ Ibid, fn 3, 20

⁶¹ NRO DCN 127/74

⁶² Simpson, *Some Queries*, 89

⁶³ NRO NNAS S2/16/15, 11

⁶⁴ NRO DCN 59/30/10

⁶⁵ NRO DCN 51/91, 6

⁶⁶ NRO DCN 51/91, 4

⁶⁷ NRO LEST/IC 58

three sets of brecks were managed. Thus it instructs: “look what lands soever any man hath in the first breck he is to have exchange for it in the fifth breck and what soever he hath in the fifth breck he is to have exchange for it in the first breck”; and in a similar fashion between second and sixth, third and seventh and fourth and eighth. In practice it does not appear to be that simple – certainly the lands that were set aside for exchange in each group of brecks does not match between the pairs outlined above (Table 6.1). There is no ‘exchange land’ in either the fourth or eighth breck of Southfield because Lestrange held all of the land, as he did in all of the East field brecks.⁶⁸ There are similar discrepancies between the pairs of brecks in the North Pasture - though lands are included in all eight brecks. The discrepancies may arise because land that is labelled as “exchange land” may not all be used as such in a given year.

Table 6.1: Acres for Exchange in Southfield Breck

Breck	Exchange Acres (a.r.p.)	Breck	Exchange Acres (a.r.p.)
1 st	27.3.20	5 th	9.2.20
2 nd	38.0.20.	6 th	11.0.0
3 rd	12.3.20	7 th	5.0.0

The management of the brecks was perhaps not as straightforward as the foregoing might imply and was clearly an issue for the Lestrange estate: for whilst exchanges are not specifically mentioned, a book of maps dated 1736 has the following on the title page: “the convenience I proposed for this pocket book was for my own more easy and better understanding, which of the lands are used by tenants of the [north and south] foldcourses; and for my more ready and certain information of any new tenants that may come in strangers to the fields”.⁶⁹

At Sedgeford compensation took the form of the temporary transfer of other parcels of lands that were not in the sheepwalk. Similarly, at Great Cressingham, in a survey of 1646, the tenants said that “diverse of them have several pieces of land within the...sheeps pasture for which they have other lands of the lord in lieu or exchange therof which lyeth within the...fields of Great Cressingham”; and at Little Cressingham: “they also inform that divers of the tenants...aforesaid have several pieces of land within the said sheeps pasture”.⁷⁰ A field book of 1600 for Anmer, includes at the back of the book a list of exchanges, a number of which are,

⁶⁸ NRO LEST/IB 90

⁶⁹ NRO LEST/CHC 11002

⁷⁰ NRO DCN 52/10, 48, 78

again, related to the sheep's pastures. Thomas Lawrence had two acres five roods of sheep's pasture for which he occupied seven roods of Stranges land in the twelfth furlong and 2½ acres in the same furlong. The other four examples are similar - all refer to land in the sheep's pasture and to less than ten acres in most cases. Several include caveats related to the fact that the exchanges do not balance. Thus, John Taylor had two acres in the sheep's pasture but was occupying 9a ½ rood in exchange, and acknowledged that he had 7a 1½ roods too much; whilst Richard Potter was receiving less than he had in the sheep's pasture and was "to be allowed 2½ roods more".⁷¹

At Ringstead, in 1650, an agreement was made between the Lestranges and their tenants regarding the outfield brecks. This was more financial in character and involved both monetary compensation and exchange. It states that the Lestranges grant that as often as the [inhabitants] "severall lands lying within the severall sheeps pastures brecks of the...foldcourses shall happen to be out of tilth laid down and ceased from plowing...shall yearly...according to antient use and custom...be allowed...four pence [per] acre". In addition, Lestrangle was to "assign...unto every such inhabitant for every acre...out of tilth...a like quantity of land...paying twelve pence [per] acre;" and if any of the tenants had more land in tilth than was "laid down to the feed and maintenance of the sheep of the foldcourses" they paid 2s per acre for such land "being in overplus".⁷²

Such compensation continued at Hilborough until enclosure but by another mechanism which was based on the value of the grass. In the 1760s an argument between Mr Caldwell and one of his tenants led to the former insisting that break lands that are laid to grass for sheep feed were not, by custom of the parish, to be ploughed. In such cases it was "equitable to make the [tenants] such recompense...as the lordship farms share of the grass then growing from clover and seeds sown in the last three years may be judged to be worth".⁷³ How the 'worth' was calculated is not explained, but Caldwell goes on to state that if the tenant has more outfield land than allowed for under corn in any year "the landlord is entitled to an addition of rent". It is also of note that by this date the brecks at Hilborough are being deliberately sown with grass and clover.

⁷¹ NRO ANW/S/2/16

⁷² NRO LEST/FF 2, 7

⁷³ NRO HIL 3/13/16/15

There are also a number of examples from the Townshend estate in Skayman's memoranda book that involve monetary payments and may represent compensation to tenants for lands that are to 'lye long': "I was with Tebold of Swaffham and rekenyd with hym for ys londes and so he have in Hellhoughton pastur and in Kypton pastur xliiij acre for the wych he <schall> have yerly xvs viijd;"⁷⁴ and "at Northcreyk and payd the tennentes for ther pasters lands ther also the same day at Donton and payd for lands in Longfield pastur."⁷⁵

The final example, is a further variant of compensation and comes from Titchwell where c.1664 the "custom for 50 years & upwards" for tenants who "have lands lying in [th]e foldcourse nott in that. . . to have 3s an acre or 3 sheep per acre going and depasturing in [th]e same foldcourse & . . .to have exchange lands in said foldcourse and nott elsewhere"⁷⁶ The last condition is made more specifically elsewhere as exchange land was "nott in [th]e infield" - which appears to be a general rule.⁷⁷ The tenants at Titchwell were however reluctant to put sheep into the flock because of arguments about the tathe – see above

Discussion

Overall, the pattern that emerges from these examples is that the exchange of lands as compensation is related to lands in the outfield that are to be left uncultivated for an extended period. All of the examples above are of early modern date but compensation in relation to outfield or breck land was being practised at Sedgeford by 1282, when a survey refers to "rent allowances" for the land of tenants which "was under *hirdgong* or fallow"⁷⁸. Fallow in this situation should be regarded as an extended period – such as the four years at Sedgeford in the seventeenth century. Williamson suggests that the compensation the tenants received was for "the sacrifice of their freedom of action and temporary loss of land which they would otherwise have been free to cultivate". The compensation is, further, an illustration that the lands in question were not part of "an ancient pattern of holding distribution and crop rotation" when no compensation would have been necessary.⁷⁹

⁷⁴ Moreton, Rutledge, 105, f 1v

⁷⁵ Ibid, 118, f 14r

⁷⁶ NRO MC 1256/1, 808x8, 58

⁷⁷ Ibid, 55

⁷⁸ Williamson, J., 'Norfolk: Thirteenth Century' in *The Peasant Land market in Medieval England* ed. Harvey, P. D. A., Oxford, (1994), 99

⁷⁹ Williamson, Norfolk: Thirteenth Century, 100

The origins of exchanges lie in the way in which the outfield, and therefore its ‘attached’ foldcourse rights, were brought into the agricultural cycle – probably by those manorial lords who owned the rights. Phrases such as “to lye long” employed at Sedgeford for example; whilst meaning longer than the infield, may imply that the period was longer than it had been formerly or was by custom and the exchanges were a response to the concerns of freeholders and tenants.⁸⁰ The ownership of lands in some outfields was clearly of early date given the presence of glebe, though formalisation into an outfield could be later. Dating such changes is difficult, but at Sedgeford compensation was in place by 1282, and the 1275 map of Richard de Stanford’s lands (Fig 4.2) indicates he held areas of breck. By contrast, at Great Massingham the description of William Elwyn’s lands suggest a more *ad hoc* operation was still in place there in the sixteenth century (p. 163). Sedgeford’s two manors were both held by Norwich Priory, the formalisation of outfields and foldcourses was therefore perhaps easier than at Hillington with three foldcourses held by separate manors. Whether the formalisation of outfield and foldcourse boundaries at the latter were co-incident is not known but if it was the case it would be a rare example of management in an East Anglian context.

This type of formal exchange also needs to be seen alongside the wholesale switching of outfield furlongs between tilth and extended fallow described in Skayman’s book; for the compensation given to individual tenants or freeholders is a consequence of such switching and again associated with outfield land becoming part of a regular cycle. Allison suggested that in some locations tenants wanted to extend the privilege of cullet rights to all those with land in the foldcourse.⁸¹ This sounds like an argument about land that was under extended fallowing and that cullet rights were being proposed as compensation to tenants’ whose land was to lay long. However, given that the manorial lords were trying to eliminate cullet rights the provision of other outfield parcels was a more realistic outcome. Similarly, an argument at Anmer in 1627 indicates that the tenants there had expectations of receiving compensation for their lands that lay “intermixt where ye sheeps pasture is layd” which they had refused to allow the flock onto “upon indifferent exchange or other recompense”.⁸²

⁸⁰ NRO DCN 51/91, 6

⁸¹ Allison, *Sheep-corn Husbandry*, 24

⁸² Postgate, M., *Field Systems*, 320

The provision of compensation to ‘protect’ the unity of the brecks, and therefore the foldcourse, by the manorial lord is also a further indication of the importance that extended fallowing played in the agrarian regime in west Norfolk. Furthermore, exchanges of land do not appear to have featured in arguments about the foldcourse which would suggest that it was a custom that was supported by both lords and tenants; and the lord, or his demesne tenant, certainly gained a clear and unambiguous sheep feed for known periods, with no arguments over half year lands, shack periods or stints.

Manorial lords, in some locations, shifted the focus of the exchanges towards a more financially based arrangement. Exchange of land is a simple process and one can see the rationale that lay behind it given that a tenant’s holdings would not be available to them for an extended period – always assuming that they ‘accepted’ the principle of the lord’s foldcourse rights over the outfield. The introduction of monetary compensation is perhaps a significant step. It could mean that the lord did not have, or did not wish to release, the necessary land to facilitate exchanges. It may also have been that opposition to the imposition of foldcourse rights was addressed by payment rather than exchange; and it might also reduce the amount of land that a lord had to set aside for the exchanges. However, the arrangements at Ringstead also indicate a more complex but more straightforwardly financial exchange: the tenants received 4d/acre for the land that they could not crop but paid 12d/acre for the land they received in exchange – a net outlay of 8d/acre. Tenants could presumably pocket the 4d and not take up the exchange land; a step that would reduce their income but on marginal outfield land perhaps not by much. Four pence is also not a lot of money – in the early seventeenth century it was what a labourer would have received for weeding the same acre.⁸³

⁸³ Bowden, *Agricultural Prices*, 662

2. FOLDCOURSE TOPOGRAPHY

An important distinction between shack and foldcourse rights is a topographical one. It is clear that, in a number of locations which operated a regime of infields and outfields or brecks, the foldcourse rights were restricted to the latter areas and this may be true more generally of other townships in East Anglia. This section will explore the relationship between the outfield and the foldcourse, and demonstrate that in a number of locations the foldcourse was restricted to the outfield or ‘sheeps pasture’ or brecks dependent on location and terminology.

2.1 Outfields and Foldcourses

Hillington lies in the ‘Good Sands’ region of west Norfolk and a field book and map of 1592 for the township allow one to examine in detail the ownership and layout of the outfield - in this case described as ‘sheeps pastures’.⁸⁴ These lands are set out in furlongs in the field book and are sub-divided into small parcels of land as in an arable furlong; some also have names such as brakes and le brech (Fig 6.1). The three ‘pastures’ are also foldcourses: the Abbot’s course, Netherhall course and Burhall course. They were held by three of the five manors in the township, and the reason why these three had a foldcourse was discussed in Chapter 4 (p. 94).

The three sheeps’ pastures or foldcourses were of approximately equal size: 123, 116 and 125 acres respectively. The lands held by the three foldcourse owners were: Abbot of Dereham 90 acres; Netherhall 83 acres; and Burhall 35 acres. The other manors – Albons and Uphall held 32 and 7 acres respectively; whilst the priories of Flitcham and Coxford held 11 and 4 acres. Of the lay owners, Mr Cobbes held 48 acres and Richard Hovell 39 acres. The land in the individual foldcourses was not however predominantly held by the owner of the foldcourse and the various landholders – both manorial and lay - hold lands that are scattered fairly evenly across all three foldcourses (Table 6.2). There are however some significant differences between the three ‘pastures’. The individual parcels in two of the courses are small: Abbots has 57 parcels of an average size of 2.2 acres; Netherhall has 68 of 1.7 acres on average. By contrast, Burhall course had half as many parcels (26) of twice the size - 4.8 acres on average, including two of 12 acres each and one of 30 acres. The comparative antiquity of the

⁸⁴ NRO NRS 26966; 21365

landholdings that lay in the outfields that form the Abbots and Netherhall courses is reinforced by the fact that they both contain glebe land whilst there is none in Burhall course.

The land in each of the three foldcourses at Hillington was thus held by a number of owners rather than one owner predominating in ‘their’ foldcourse. The three holders of foldcourse rights must presumably have arrived, amicably, at the arrangement described above; itself a further indication of ‘organisation’. How old these arrangements are is unknown. The layout of the outfields themselves in at least two cases is perhaps twelfth or thirteenth century but the pattern of foldcourses could have been set at any time. Hillington does however provide a model of how the foldcourses were managed and set out in other multi-manorial villis. This is also a picture of the past – for, by the early seventeenth century, Richard Hovell held all five manors and in 1592 was either the tenant or the owner of the majority of the lands in the three courses.⁸⁵

Table 6.2: Breakdown of Landholdings by Course in Hillington ‘Sheeps Pastures’

OWNER	COURSE								
	Abbots			Netherhall			Burhall		
	A	R	P	A	R	P	A	R	P
Abbot of Dereham	11	3	14	35	2	24	42	1	19
Albins	5	3	20	16	2	38	9	2	39
Burhall	13	2	4	17	1	21	5	1	0
Netherhall	29	3	5	17	1	20	35	2	36
Prior of Flitcham	8	2	12				2	1	36
Prior of Coxford				3	3	33			
Uphall					2	15	6	2	29
Mr Cobbes	23	3	34	19	0	13	5	1	2
Hovell	21	2	0				17	3	7
The rectorie	6	3	8	2	3	20			
Edmund Chartres	1	0	32		3	24			
Little Massingham				1	0	20			
totals	123	0	9	115	2	28	125	1	8

⁸⁵ Blomefield, 8, 460-468; NRO NRS 26966



Fig 6.1: Foldcourses at Hillington

At Grimston, in the Good Sands, a terrier of 1590 but with a number of seventeenth-century alterations divides the open-field arable into four fields: North, Middle, South and Oke.⁸⁶ The fields are also divided into “*intra viam*” and “*extra viam*” - the way in question is probably Eastgate way which is mentioned in relation to both South and Oke fields. There is an ‘Eastgate drove’ marked on the current 1:25,000 Ordnance Survey map and an un-named way appears on Faden’s map in the same location. It lies to the east of the settlement and perhaps divided the better land from the less so, given that further to the east are Grimston and Gayton commons. The terrier also refers to the outfield, which “outfields lands...sworne in court and the order of foldages for sheep then and since”, and to “long furlong also north field outlying” where there was “24 acres of outway lands alias sheeps pastures... in diverse peces”.⁸⁷ The outfield is clearly subdivided, as in Lambcoate hill breck which had seven parcels of one to four acres and 18 acres in total and there were four foldcourses at Grimston (see p. 117). The terrier also includes a farm lease of 1661 for 229 acres of infield, 240 acres of outfield and two brecks each of 60 acres.

The relationship between outfields or brecks and the foldcourse, and, the restriction of foldcourse rights to the outfield, is made explicit in an agreement, of 1650, between Hamon le Strange and the inhabitants of Great Ringstead. The south foldcourse of 800 sheep had “the right to feed and depasture all the sheep pasture lands yearly unsown and lyeing...within the south field and liberty of shack in the infield of the south parish or parish of St Peter”.⁸⁸ The same rights - and distinction between infield and outfield - were accorded to the north flock of Great Ringstead.⁸⁹ Similarly the Parliamentary survey of Sedgeford in 1649 states that the infield was not to “lye long” for the sheep and that the two foldcourses were to be kept “partly upon the shack of the arable ground, whether customary ffreehold or demesne”.⁹⁰

At Great Cressingham, a survey of 1646 describes two sheep’s pastures. One, was on the east side of Great Cressingham “between the field of Great Cressingham on part of the west...and will keep 500 sheep per annum”. At the west end of the town in Little Cressingham there was a “sheeps pasture or foldcourse...called Waterend Heath [and] the said sheeps pasture...will

⁸⁶ NRO BL/CS/6/3/2/2

⁸⁷ NRO BL/CS/6/3/2/2, 2

⁸⁸ NRO LEST/FF 2, 1

⁸⁹ NRO LEST/FF 2, 2, 3

⁹⁰ NRO DCN 51/91, 6

keep...about 600 sheep”.⁹¹ In both cases the tenants said that “divers of them have several pieces of land within the said sheeps pasture”. The outfield, c.1500, of East Walton is referred to as pasture in a terrier listing the pastures by furlong, each of which is divided into parcels and their holder and size given.⁹² At Anmer, a field book of 1600 describes the furlongs numbered 35 to 38 and 48 to 52 as *pastur oviis*. These were of varying size (from 12 to over 30 acres) and sub-division: some divided into two or three parcels whilst others had ten or more.⁹³

The link between outfield and the foldcourse is also made explicit in an eighteenth-century copy of a 1600 map of North Creak (Fig 6.2). The three foldcourses – Conyer, Frith and Shammer - labelled courses on the map and called ‘pastures’, are marked out with coloured boundaries. The three foldcourses lie next to the infield and a note at the south-east corner of the Frith states that “the boundary omitted...at the south end of the outfield by the rector’s index to this plott”.⁹⁴ The layout of the neighbouring parish of South Creak was similar with, in the sixteenth century, furlongs labelled brecks and areas of *pastura bidens* to the west of the township and contiguous with those of North Creak.⁹⁵

It is thus clear that in some if not all infield-outfield locations the manorial right to a foldcourse was limited to the outfield and was separate to the right of shack over the infield. This limitation and separation of rights has not previously, I believe, been explored. Whether these arrangements were co-incident with the establishment of foldcourses is unknown but in a number of townships the layout of the outfields may be twelfth or thirteenth century or earlier based on the presence of glebe lands.

⁹¹ NRO DCN 52/10, 48, 78

⁹² NRO BIR 26, 396X7, 96

⁹³ NRO ANW/S/2/16

⁹⁴ NRO NRS 3503

⁹⁵ Hesse, 83, 87

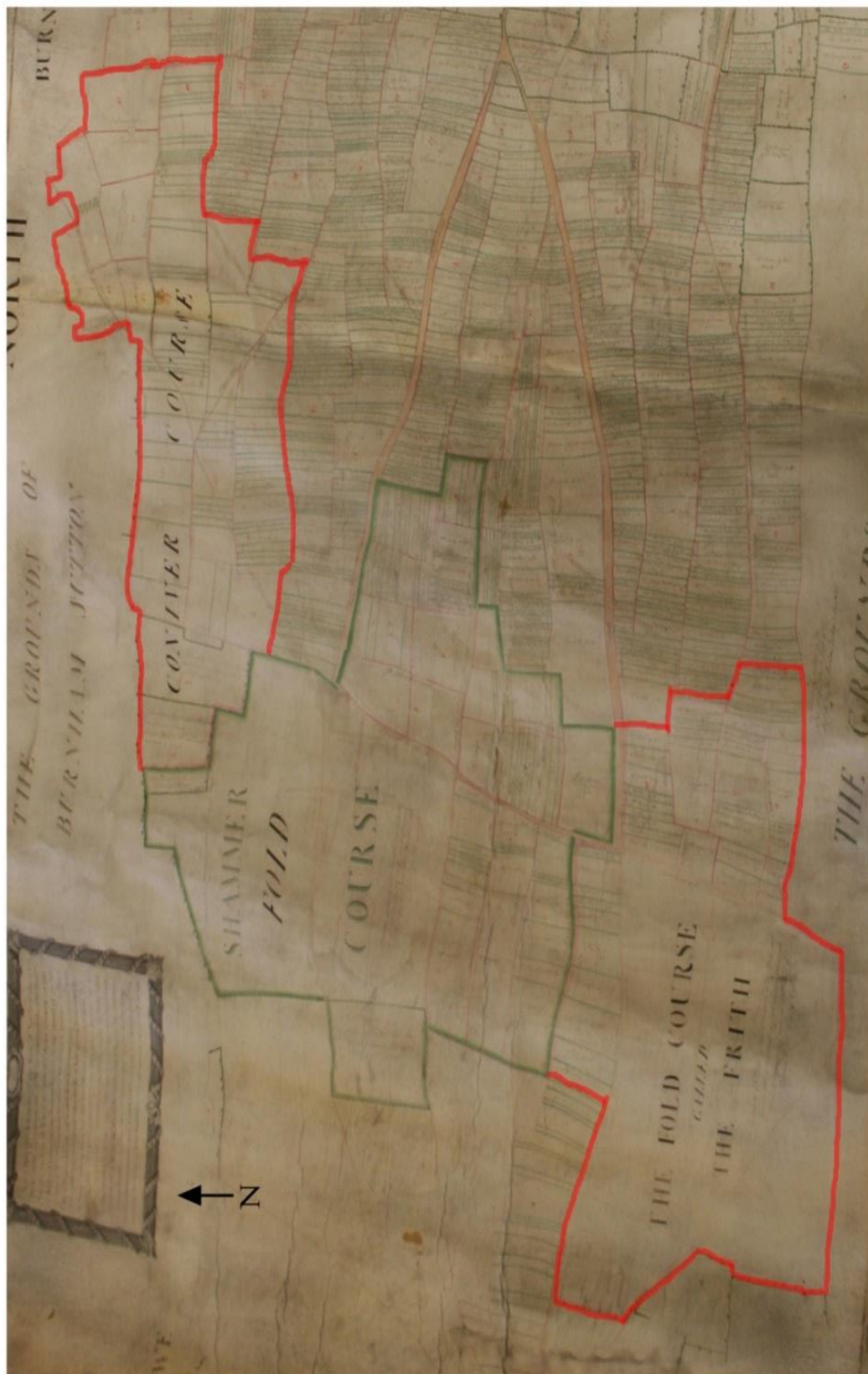


Fig 6.2: Foldcourses at North Creake

2.2 Outfields and Herdgongs

The term ‘herdgong’ or hirdgong was employed at Sedgeford (see p 142) and is probably another term for sheep’s pastures. Herdgong was still in use in a 1693 field book for Sedgeford where reference is made to *quarentenae* in Crowe and Blackstone herdgongs in the first and second precincts, separately from those which were infield.⁹⁶ At both Hunstanton and Snettisham the documents make clear that, c.1600 there was only one foldcourse in each township and that it was confined to a single field. One possible reason for this is that in both places the layouts of the other fields (Swetefield and the furlongs north of the settlement at Snettisham, and West field at Hunstanton) were tenurially complex with significant numbers of small parcels of land held by freeholders, and at Snettisham an intermingling of the holdings of nine manors.⁹⁷ However, the fact that the foldcourse was restricted to a single field suggests that those fields were formerly outfields.

At Hunstanton a rental of 1569 divides the demesne land of the Eastfield into arable and non-arable; the former being 215 acres, part of which was called the ‘great errable close’. The field also included two parcels of 20 and 40 acres of demesne, described as non-arable on a field map of 1612 but which, a century earlier, had been in tilth. The two parcels were, in the seventeenth century, called ‘neats pasture’ and ‘sheeps pasture’ which Oestmann assumes were by that date permanent pasture. He also speculates that a form of infield-outfield was being practised but concluded that there was no positive documentary evidence.⁹⁸ I would suggest that parts at least of Eastfield were outfield given the use of terms such as sheeps pasture and the way in which lands rotated between arable and pasture. In addition, and unlike the Westfield, which can be considered to be infield; there was a manorial foldcourse, for 1000 sheep, over the Eastfield, which was almost entirely in the lord’s hands.⁹⁹ Furthermore, a lease for the lord’s lands in Eastfield in 1544 indicates that the land was of variable quality - including marsh, pasture; but also heathland over which the lessees were required to leave ‘whynnes’ sufficient for the flock.¹⁰⁰ A further indication of the sixteenth-century division at Hunstanton is that sheep were restricted from shack on the Westfield “to preserve grazing for larger animals” and that sheep farmers were amerced for keeping sheep in the field.¹⁰¹

⁹⁶ NRO LEST/IC 57

⁹⁷ Blomefield, 10, 370-376

⁹⁸ Oestmann, 40

⁹⁹ Ibid, 112, 145

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, 39

¹⁰¹ Ibid, 114

At Snettisham, the evidence for the East field, which had a foldcourse for 700 sheep, being formerly outfield is less circumstantial.¹⁰² A late sixteenth-century survey of Snettisham, describes a number of furlongs in the Eastfield as parts of a herdgong.¹⁰³ Three are identified: north with five references; middle with three; and south with two. The furlongs in question clearly lie on an east-west axis (Fig 6.3) – particularly those of the north and middle herdgongs.

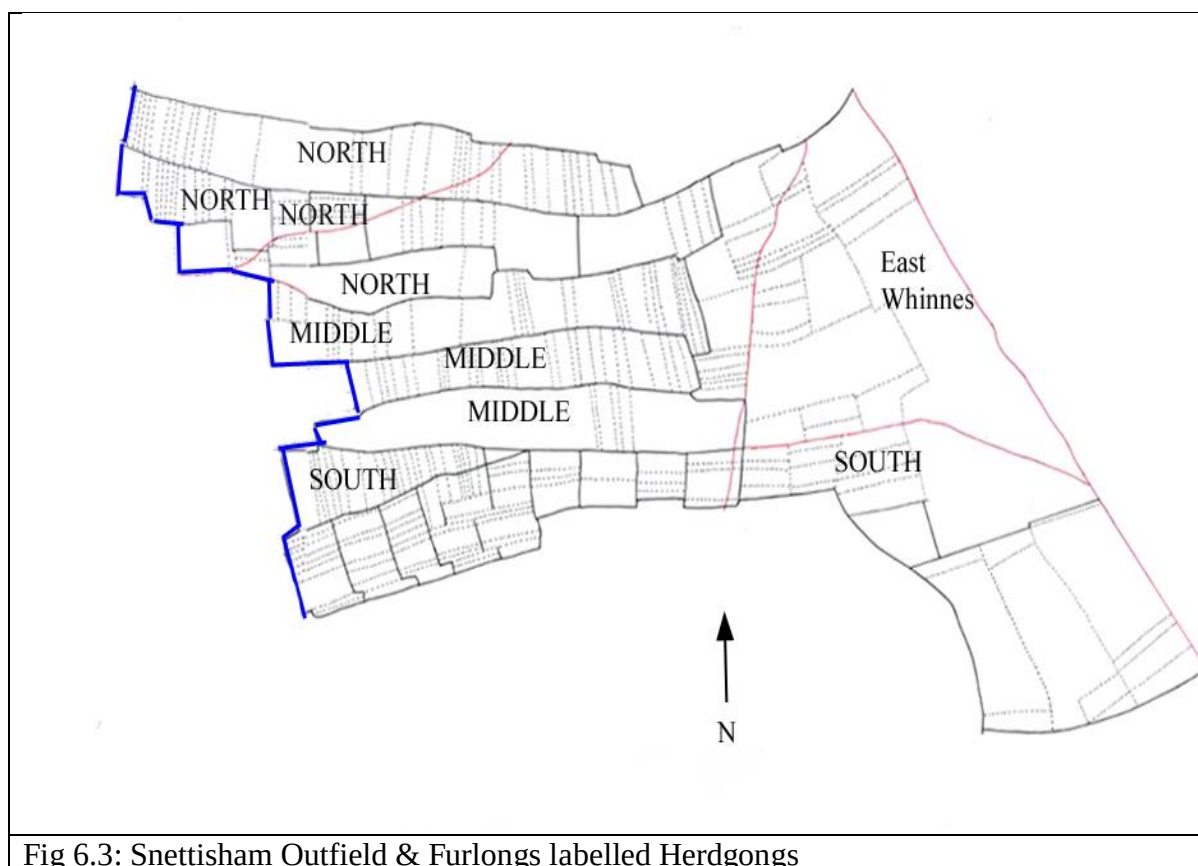


Fig 6.3: Snettisham Outfield & Furlongs labelled Herdgongs

The layout of the herdgongs at Snettisham, their location in Eastfield which lies on the relatively poorer soils of the parish, and their name being indicative of their former status as sheep's pastures, all indicate that Eastfield was formerly outfield. This may not have applied to the entire field as mapped in 1625 - the large blocks of land towards the eastern boundary on Peddars way were perhaps permanent pasture - particularly the East Whinnes. A number of the furlongs in question are highly divided; whilst others contain large parcels of land. The 1591 survey also indicates a different pattern of tenancies in Eastfield: 27% of the parcels have no entry for the tenancy status compared to 13% in the neighbouring Swetefield, and Eastfield also has a significantly higher acreage under leasehold – 422 acres - compared to 55 acres in

¹⁰² NRO LEST/Q 32, 97

¹⁰³ NRO LEST/Q 32 47-69

Swetefield.¹⁰⁴ Unlike Hillington, there is no glebe land in either of the suggested former outfields at Hunstanton or Snettisham; the former's glebe land (27 acres) is confined to the Westfield and Snettisham's ten acres is in Swetefield.¹⁰⁵

The term herdgong also appears in a field book of 1727 for Shernborne where the arable was, by this date, divided into whole year lands, infield half year lands and herdgongs; the rents (per acre) for which were a noble, a crown and half a crown respectively. The four herdgongs are summarised in the following table (Table 6.3).¹⁰⁶ As elsewhere, the outfields at Shernborne were extensively sub-divided and (based on the presence of glebe in three out of the four) of an early date. There is, however, no evidence in the field book as to whether the foldcourse was restricted to the outfields though both foldcourse and shackle were an issue at Shernborne in the late sixteenth century (p 199). The term herdgong may also be a local term given that Sedgford, Snettisham and Shernborne form a contiguous group of parishes.

Table 6.3: Shernborne Herdgongs (1727)

	SIZE (a. r.)	No. PARCELS	GLEBE
1	81a 1r	40	1 parcel (1a 3r)
2	92a 1r	48	
3	156a	67	3 parcels (3a 3r)
4	199a	96	4 parcels (9a 3r)

It is thus clear that in some if not all infield-outfield townships the manorial right to a foldcourse was limited to the outfield and was separate to the right of shack over the infield. The origin of the outfields in a number of townships was, based on the presence of glebe lands, early – no later than the twelfth or thirteenth century or earlier; even if their use was irregular. Foldcourse owners had rights over the whole of their outfield foldcourse which were thus in effect ‘several’ when in fallow. However, by recognized custom in a number of locations, owners of lands within those foldcourses received compensation for their lands so affected through the fallow period; arrangements which manorial lords appear, however reluctantly, to have supported.

¹⁰⁴ NRO LEST/Q 32

¹⁰⁵ NRO LEST/BH 2; LEST/Q 32

¹⁰⁶ NRO MC 40/55, 485x7

3. FOLDCOURSE DIVERSITY

The foldcourse is principally associated with the Breckland and Good Sands regions, although it was also present on the north Norfolk heathlands.¹⁰⁷ There are, however, a number of locations where the foldcourse existed within a more diverse landscape. The first are townships at the fringe of those “core” regions, which had abundant sources of pasture for their flocks on marshes or fen. The second comprises townships along the edge of the claylands which display elements of sheep-corn husbandry alongside regimes typical of the clay plateau. The third zone is south Cambridgeshire, which amalgamated the foldcourse with a pattern of nucleated settlement and the large common fields characteristic of the Midland system.

3.1 Feltwell

Feltwell was part of Breckland but it also lay on the edge of the Fens, as a consequence of which it had extensive pasturing, such that in the early seventeenth century the tenants of Feltwell manor were not stinted as to the number of animals they could keep. The manor having “a liberty of foldcourse for 1000 sheep besides a cullet flock of weather sheep without number”; and the tenants “may keepe as many sheepe as all the other four mannors”.¹⁰⁸ There were at the same period three other foldcourses held by Easthall and Southall manors, and Mr Mounteforde.¹⁰⁹ The document is a copy made in 1648 of a 1622 description by “all the shephards that kept shepe [in Feltwell] did upon their oaths sett downe the bounds and abbuttals of all four sheepwalks...as they have always been used and comenly reputed in the fields, fenns and heath grounds”. The document is in agreement with a terrier of 1631 in which the sheepwalks of Feltwell manor are also set out.¹¹⁰

The sheepwalks were over the five fields listed in the 1631 terrier as outfielders. These were: Larkfield, Mickleburgh field, Eastfield, Threehow field and Southfield - which for the purposes of the sheepwalks were divided between the four foldcourse holders as follows. Larkfield and Mickleburgh fields each had three sheepwalks: those of Feltwell and Easthall manors, and Mr Mountforde. Mickleburgh was also open to Southall manor when [unclear] was in shift. Feltwell manor had the whole of Eastfield for one-month shack then Easthall and Mr

¹⁰⁷ Wade Martins, Williamson, *Roots of Change*, 43

¹⁰⁸ NRO MC 2411/1/20, 968x3, 2,3

¹⁰⁹ NRO MC/2411/1/22, 968x5

¹¹⁰ NRO MC/2411/1/21, 968x5

Mountforde's flocks had their feed. The latter also had the "severall feed" of the field when it "lay longe". In Threehow field, Feltwell manor had a sheepwalk over the first two furlongs, Easthall over the next two, and the remainder was a sheepwalk of Southall manor. Finally, in Southfield Southall manor had a sheepwalk over the first two furlongs; and over the remainder the flocks of Feltwell and Easthall manors "hath their walke". The layout is presumably a mirror image of the shift pattern and it is noticeable that the fields are mostly divided between different sheepwalks, suggesting that the crop regime was field based. A later map of 1811 shows the outfields of the township divided into blocks of sheepwalk, but by this date there were only three manors: Christ's College which was formerly Easthall; Miss Clough who held Feltwell manor and Mr Denton's.¹¹¹

The 1648 document also sets out the division of rights over the inham fields. The right is described as liberty of shack in the manorial terrier of 1631 for Feltwell manor and was from the end of harvest until Lady Day on the unsown lands - a restriction that one can assume applied to the other manors as well.¹¹² The inham fields, over which the manors also had their several sheepwalks were divided as follows: south inham was exclusive to Feltwell manor, except for Southall wong which was several to Southall. Barrett's inham was several to Easthall manor, and North inham was divided between Feltwell manor, Easthall and Mr Mountforde.¹¹³ An 'inham' is "a piece of land taken in or enclosed", and Feltwell manor certainly had, in 1631, 224 acres of "inclosed lands" mostly in c.20 acres closes.¹¹⁴ Assuming all of the inham 'fields' were similarly enclosed, the sheep of the separate flocks presumably grazed, rather than being folded, over the closes that were open to them.

The portions of heath that each of the four foldcourse owners held were also delineated in the 1648 document. Thus, in effect the lands – inham, outfield, meadow and heath - are several and portioned out between the four foldcourses either as sheepwalks or shackle. Whether this represents a division of some antiquity or was a recent re-arrangement of a previously more entangled situation is unknown. The fact that the arrangements have been documented in considerable detail as to boundaries and abutments, would suggest the latter – perhaps as a

¹¹¹ Blomefield, 2, 188, 189

¹¹² NRO MC 2411/1/21, 986X5

¹¹³ Ibid

¹¹⁴ Martin, Satchell, 27; NRO MC 2411/1/21

response to disagreements, or the need to consolidate holdings. The shepherds “as they have always been used” should perhaps be taken with a pinch of salt.

Furthermore, the 1631 terrier for Feltwell manor states that “the lord of the mannor hath his feed and walke for his flocke at all tymes of the yeare over all of North fenn conteyning by estimation 5000 acres.”¹¹⁵ The 1648 copy of the shepherds’ opinions offers a rather different view. In reference to what are called the fen brinks and lammas meadows, the flocks of each of the four foldcourse owners had a defined area of these lands as feed. Also, “all the said severall flocks have...free walk and feed at all times over the common fen called north fenn”.¹¹⁶

3.2 Titchwell

Titchwell lies on the north-west coast of Norfolk and the manor was owned by Magdalene College, Oxford.¹¹⁷ It was held, in the third quarter of the seventeenth century, by Sir Thomas Sclater who is believed to be the author of a volume describing the parish.¹¹⁸ The book provides a detailed breakdown of the “order of plowing sowing and husbandry” for the infield ground which was employed to grow wheat and rye in two separate rotations. That for wheat was first year wheat, followed by barley, peas, oats, “pease again without mucking” and barley; and for rye, firstly rye, then barley, peas, barley; followed by one year grass. As for maintaining fertility, it is specified that the summerlay is ploughed with three or four earths and is mucked with 15 or 20 full cartloads and again ploughed after harvest.¹¹⁹ The large number of cart loads is I would suggest for the whole cycle - as is made clear in a third version of husbandry which states that the infield lands are sown firstly with wheat, rye or barley, then barley, peas, and barley – oats were not to be sown in the infield. This cycle is followed by one year fallow or summerlay. The land was to be mucked with “12 or 16 load of dung laid on an acre of somerly for five years viz first year is fallow and 4 yeares plowed thats 3 loads an acre every yeare”.¹²⁰

All three versions display a degree of intensity that is uncommon in the region, especially given that there is no period of extended fallow. There are several reasons for such intensity - all of

¹¹⁵ NRO MC 2411/1/21, 968X5

¹¹⁶ NRO MC 2411/1/22, 968X5

¹¹⁷ Blomefield, 10,395

¹¹⁸ NRO MC 1256/1, 808x8 catalogue

¹¹⁹ NRO MC 1256/1, 808x8, 45

¹²⁰ NRO MC 1256/1, 808x8, 46

which are probably correct to some degree. Firstly, the settlement lying between the saltmarshes and the well-drained, calcareous, coarse loamy soils of the Newmarket 2 association (343g), is itself on the rather better soils of the Hunstanton association (571r) which form a coastal fringe next to the marshes in this part of the county and consist of well drained, fine and coarse loamy till soils.¹²¹ The arable rotations are all specifically for the infield, and the “wheat grounds [and] better...lye nearer to the towne”.¹²² It is therefore likely that the infield was restricted to the narrow strip of good soils and this, together with the high level of manuring that the soils received between each crop, allowed for a more intensive cropping regime. Secondly, all of the rotations employ peas as part of the cycle, which being legumes will provide further benefit. To what degree the value of peas was understood at this time is unclear but it is notable that the first rotation above, which includes them in the cycle twice, specifically excludes manuring prior to sowing on the second occasion.

The foldcourse for 800 sheep was restricted to the brecks which were available all the year as was the feed of 68 acres in the saltmarsh.¹²³ The foldcourse (and the brecks) covered 480 acres of which the lord, in 1664 had two thirds. The rectory had 42 acres in eleven parcels in the brecks; together with 27 parcels of infield, mostly of one acre or less.¹²⁴ The remaining 160 acres were held by nine people, five having between 10 and 50 acres each and the others each holding a few acres. The brecks were divided into “12 breaks att 40 acres to a breck”.¹²⁵ The brecks at Titchwell followed a similar regime to other townships in the region, which also lay on the Newmarket soils, with extended periods of cropping and then fallow. The cropping regime of the brecks was laid down as: first year fallow (presumably summerlay); second year rye (“theres noe wheat grounds there”); followed by barley then peas and finally oats,¹²⁶ leaving an extended fallow of six or seven years. The breck at Titchwell, as at Sedgeford and elsewhere, were tathed or double tathed.¹²⁷

¹²¹ Hodge *et al*, 225

¹²² NRO MC 1256/1, 808x8, 45

¹²³ NRO MC 1256/1, 808x8, 57, 54

¹²⁴ Ibid, 32

¹²⁵ Ibid, 53

¹²⁶ Ibid, 62

¹²⁷ Ibid, 54, 105

3.3 Barrow and Little Saxham

Barrow and Little Saxham lie on the southern edge of Breckland and display a distinct division in their agrarian practices - each being, in broad terms, divided between sheep-corn country and the wood pasture region. The settlement of Little Saxham lies on the division with, to the south the chalky till soils of the Hanslope (411d) and Ashley (572q) associations, the former being slowly permeable whilst the latter are stagnogleyic or slowly permeable and seasonally waterlogged.¹²⁸ To the north of the settlement are the light soil associations of Swaffham Prior (511e) and Melford (571o). The former soils are mostly well drained, coarse and fine loamy over chalk, whilst those of the Melford association are similar in the area around Bury St Edmunds, the predominant series in the association is the Barrow series in which blown sands “have been incorporated into the upper horizons.”¹²⁹ The same four soils form a similar north-south division in Barrow as well.

These distinctions can be seen clearly in several maps of the parishes. A map of Barrow in 1597 displays the enclosures and woodland to the south of the parish whilst the northern part was still open field and had to the north east an area called the foldcourse.¹³⁰ The tithe map of 1839¹³¹ (Fig. 4) indicates little change with the open fields divided into small strips and which remained so until 1848, when 1655 acres were inclosed under a General Act.¹³² A map of Little Saxham¹³³ of 1638 (Fig. 6.5) is similar to the Barrow map with the closes and meadows predominantly to the south marked by green lines; whilst the open fields – eight in total – marked by red lines are to the north and east of the parish. The open fields are clearly in the process of further piecemeal enclosure – hemmed in as they mostly are by closes – and the parish was not subject to Parliamentary Enclosure. Along the northern boundary of the parish are the heath (92 acres) and the warren which is described as “part sheep ground and part arable”, of 136 acres, and equivalent to outfield or breck. There is also the shepherd’s watchtower on the heath.

¹²⁸ Hodge *et al*, 209, 210, 96,97

¹²⁹ Hodge *et al* 316, 318, 245

¹³⁰ Postgate, *Field Systems*, fig 7.2

¹³¹ SROB T11/2

¹³² Tate, W. E., ed Turner, M., *A Domesday of Enclosures Acts and Awards*, (1978) 245

¹³³ SRO B 1167/11



Fig 6.4: Tithe Map of Barrow, 1839



3.4 Cambridgeshire

As described in previous chapters, the field systems and settlements of south-east Cambridgeshire look, in a sense, two ways at once: the landscape is one of nucleated settlement surrounded by large open fields, with individual holdings distributed across all of the fields – giving the physical impression of a Midland system. However, the operation of those fields: their variable size and in some places number, the presence and survival of more flexible cropping shifts based on the furlong or even strip is much closer to an East Anglian model. The region was thus a “transitional zone”. It was also an area with a significant number of foldcourses and this section will examine a number of the ‘foldcourse’ elements and the similarities and differences with the core zone of the foldcourse.

Infield-Outfield

Given the light soils of the south and south-east of Cambridgeshire, there is substantial evidence for ley farming and infield-outfield agriculture. From the sixteenth century, some open-field strips were described as ‘*terras inclusas*’ and these were often enclosed and managed as leys, for example at Snailwell in 1566 there were 100 acres of ley land in a number of fields; whilst at neighbouring Chippenham in the thirteenth century and, again in 1544, in the fields close to the heath there were references to ‘la leys’ and ‘le leye’.¹³⁴ Also, lands that had been arable in the twelfth century were by 1544 heath.¹³⁵ At Ickleton sections of all three main fields were set aside as leys in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, providing further feed for the flocks; with some large parcels “being seldom eared or sown”.

Infield-outfield agriculture was regularly practised, in the early modern period, along the chalk escarpment in the east including Brinkley, West Wrating and Weston Colville.¹³⁶ The soils of this group of parishes consist of lighter calcareous soils, and on the higher ground to the east chalky boulder clay. They also had similar patterns of land use in the medieval period running – east to west - from heaths, then open fields and areas of ancient enclosures and commons on the higher ground.¹³⁷ A map of Burrough Green of 1694 shows an area of outfield between the heath to the west and the open fields to the east.¹³⁸ At Fowlmere until 1795, Heath field was

¹³⁴ Postgate, PhD, 277, 211

¹³⁵ Spufford, Cambridgeshire Community, 19, 43, 42

¹³⁶ Postgate, Field Systems, 301

¹³⁷ Harrison, S., 36, 45

¹³⁸ CRO 101/P1; Harrison, 45

managed as outfield: half always reserved for sheep and the other half cropped for three years then left fallow.¹³⁹ The field name suggests land of poorer quality and there was a field of the same name in Thriplow, whilst Duxford had a Moor field.¹⁴⁰ In all three cases the names which were in use by c. 1300 perhaps indicate that arable cultivation had been extended to include marginal lands in response to population pressure.

Cropping Regimes

The cropping regimes of the region, as befits its transitional situation, display examples that fit both a system based on the field and one where the fields and courses were not co-incident. For example, Melbourne had, in 1318, four open fields in a three-course rotation.¹⁴¹ Williamson however suggests that it is unlikely, even where there were three open fields that a compact ‘field sized’ fallow necessarily existed.¹⁴² Postgate writes that in Cambridgeshire, as in East Anglia the furlong was commonly the basic unit of cropping from the fourteenth century onwards, as at West Wratting where in the early fourteenth century *cultura* (furlongs) in different fields were divided into three groups.¹⁴³ In townships with varying number of fields of different sizes, a pattern of shifts based on the furlong was asymmetrically imposed on the field pattern in order to maintain an appropriate ratio of sown and fallow.¹⁴⁴

By the sixteenth century a three-course rotation was common in this area, and stray references suggest it was long established. At Thriplow the three fields appear to have been cultivated in a three-course rotation in 1251 and 1356.¹⁴⁵ The situation was similar at Fowlmere and Ickleton (despite its somewhat irregular field pattern) – and reference is often made to ‘common field shifts’.¹⁴⁶ However, at Snailwell, in 1738, the field was clearly not the basis of cropping with the demesne’s winter and spring sown crops and fallow in a mixture across the fields: in the North field there was 19 acres of barley and 7 of oats; in Bury field 24 acres of wheat, 21 acres of rye, 35 of barley, and 22 acres not sown; in Small field there were 41 acres of barley, 2 of oats and 27 acres not sown; whilst the whole of Newmarket field was fallow.¹⁴⁷ A late

¹³⁹ Keeling, S., ‘Fowlmere’ *VCH, Cambridgeshire*, 8, 159

¹⁴⁰ CRO Q/RDc/65 map; Wright, A., ‘Duxford’ *VCH Cambridgeshire*, 6, 210; CRO Q/RDz 10

¹⁴¹ Postgate Field Systems, 297

¹⁴² Williamson *Medieval Landscapes*, 80

¹⁴³ Postgate PhD, 223; Harrison, S., 46

¹⁴⁴ Postgate Field Systems, 298

¹⁴⁵ Keeling, S. ‘Thriplow’ *VCH Cambridgeshire*, 8, 242

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid*, 8, 159; Rosen, A., ‘Ickleton’, *VCH, Cambridgeshire*, 6, 238; Postgate Field Systems, 298

¹⁴⁷ CRO R/55/7/43/10

seventeenth-century account by the rector of Fowlmere describes the three-course rotation as first year “the tilth” when wheat, rye and sometimes barley were sown; the second year was “the broke crop” which was usually barley, followed by fallow.¹⁴⁸ Finally, a 1638 lease for “twenty acres of arable in fields of Thriplow in twenty peeces” details five in West field, seven in Heath field, and eight in Church field and in this case the lessor also having the right to feed his sheep over the arable.¹⁴⁹

Folding

As in any light soil sheep-corn region the folding of sheep on the arable was widespread throughout Cambridgeshire; but, as in other aspects of the county’s transitional situation, common flocks were found throughout the county, particularly in the west where in general grazing rights followed the ‘Midland’ pattern, being exercised by the whole community.¹⁵⁰ Alongside such communal elements, the foldcourse system with its manorial control of flocks and folding was also widespread in medieval Cambridgeshire. At Fen Ditton in the east of the county one area of the open field was part of a private sheepwalk, and at Wood Ditton in 1290 all those who had sheep had to put them in the lord’s fold. All of the demesnes of Ramsey and Ely abbeys had similar seigniorial rights, as did the Abbot of Crowland at Dry Drayton and such rights were also active at Oakington, Fullbourne, Burrough Green, Whittlesford and Snailwell.¹⁵¹

At Chippenham in the fifteenth century there were common rights of pasture over the fallow.¹⁵² The tenants were also able to keep sheep - stinted according to the size of their holding and for which they paid to put them in the manorial flock. Free tenants however had the right of free fold; which in one case (of a half a yardland) had right of foldage for 140 sheep “for the reasonable manuring of the same”, at the rate of five acres each year.¹⁵³ Similarly in Duxford, there were early examples of what are described as ‘sheepwalks’ but may be more accurately described as foldage rights: half-yardlands of D’Abernon’s manor, let c. 1300, had sheepwalk for 40 – 60 sheep; and the lord was also at this time converting some half-yardlands to life

¹⁴⁸ Brassley, P. Lambert, A. Saunders, P. eds. *Account of the Revd John Crankanthorpe of Fowlmere, 1682-1710*, Cambridge, (1988), 12, 31

¹⁴⁹ CRO 413/T5

¹⁵⁰ Postgate Field Systems, 318, 319; Postgate PhD, 237

¹⁵¹ Postgate PhD, 237, 236, 237

¹⁵² Spufford, Cambridgeshire Community, 19

¹⁵³ Ibid, 20

tenancies with which the stinting may be connected.¹⁵⁴ A yardland in Chippenham, in 1560, was 30 acres though in fact it varied from 28 to 36 acres and a half-yardland from 14 to 18 acres.¹⁵⁵ Assuming a half-yardland was 16 acres and there was a three-course rotation, this would give approximately 5 acres in each course – equivalent to the rate of five acres above. However, a stint of 3 sheep per acre of fallow (see below) would equal a fold of 15 head not 140. The figures from Duxford indicate a rather more modest ‘over-supply’ with a flock of 40 – 60 sheep. Is 140 a misprint for 40? Alternatively, the majority of the freeholder’s flock could have been in the manorial flock or rented out to other tenants; and both examples are indicative of the extent to which medieval flocks could be populated by the tenants’ sheep. At Linton, on both the Barham and Linton estates, the tenants were allowed to put sheep in the lord’s flock but were charged for so doing; in 1600 twelve tenants had c.230 sheep in the flock.¹⁵⁶

By the sixteenth century, the pressure from manorial lords or their lessees to increase the number of their sheep in the flocks was growing. In Chippenham in 1518 the farmer of Walden was keeping over 200 sheep on 40 acres of fallow and “was ordered” to reduce this to 120 – “or three sheep for every acre of fallow”. Another farmer was, similarly required to reduce his flock of 400 to 200 – “or two for every acre [of fallow] he held” These controls were however “fruitless”.¹⁵⁷ In 1544 it was stated that all great cattle were included in customary rights over the stubble, but, by the same date, customary sheep rights were under pressure. Thomas Bowles having significantly increased the numbers of sheep in the demesne flocks was “trying to deny [the tenants] right to common their own sheep”, and “putting his sheep into the stubble before the cattle”, in effect it would appear to control, for himself, the shack right.¹⁵⁸

At Duxford, in addition to the half-yardlands described above a farm, also probably of D’Abernons, that was leased in 1358 included a sheepwalk for 200 head. This description of Chippenham and Duxford implies a more diverse approach in the medieval period, though still within the confines of manorial rights but one not dissimilar to other places in East Anglia. There were also, however, disputes – as between Tilty Abbey and Sir John D’Abernon over foldcourse rights in 1279; the latter claiming that the Abbey was bound, as his tenants, to put

¹⁵⁴ Wright, ‘Duxford’ *VCH Cambridgeshire*, 6, 210

¹⁵⁵ Spufford, M., *Contrasting Communities*, Stroud, (2000), 35 fn 103

¹⁵⁶ Wright, A ‘Linton’ *VCH Cambridgeshire*, 6, 92

¹⁵⁷ Spufford, *Cambridgeshire Community*, 43

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 19, 44

200 sheep in his fold every other night and to provide a shepherd – presumably the Abbey was free to fold their own land the other night.¹⁵⁹

As in other parts of East Anglia, the problems caused by the impact of piecemeal enclosure on the ability of the manorial flock to feed was an issue: for example at Linton in 1540 it was declared that “none shall sow...any crofts inclosed or any other lands lying...in the fallow fields to the hindrance of the Lord’s sheepwalke”; and led to the development of half year closes, which in Cambridgeshire were “communable from Lammas (1st August) to Christmas” - a period is similar to the period of shack in other parts of East Anglia, though commencing and finishing earlier than most of the latter.¹⁶⁰ The situation at Linton implies a shack right but references to shack in a Cambridgeshire context appear rare, perhaps because it was not contested or abused. At Chippenham, by 1770, shackle over the heathland which was being ploughed for the first time in several centuries “had been abolished”; Vancouver writing in 1794 with regard to Duxford, reckoned that “no improvement is possible...without laying intermixed lands together in the open fields and suppressing the rights of sheepwalk and shackle”; and he made similar references to shack rights over the common fields at Balsham and Dullingham.¹⁶¹ Unfortunately, the enclosure awards for Cambridgeshire that I have examined do not, unlike those for numbers of parishes in north-west Norfolk, separate out awards for shack rights.

At Hinxton the pasturing arrangements were in part, at least, communal - there being separate Cow and Sheep Commons, both of which are delineated on the inclosure map - and until 1780 the parish had three flocks of around 500 sheep in total. These belonged to the lord of the manor, Amey’s farm, and those with right of common. This last flock being allowed the run of the fallow field with the manorial flock until, in 1780, the tenant of the Manor farm restricted the right to his own flock and that of the other farm.¹⁶² In Thriplow the pastures were primarily held in severalty, alongside 100 acres of common heath and 30 acres of common pasture. In 1251 the Bishop of Ely had a sheepfold for nearly 1000 of his own and his tenants’ sheep, and an indenture of 1615 for the foldcourse of Bacons Manor in Thriplow specifies, as well as the heath ground and sheep’s pastures, “a close of pasture lately inclosed” and part of the heath,

¹⁵⁹ Wright, Duxford, 210

¹⁶⁰ Postgate, PhD, 240, 241

¹⁶¹ Spufford, Cambridgeshire Community, 53; Vancouver, C., *General View of the Agriculture of County of Cambridgeshire*, London, (1794), 22, 65, 74,

¹⁶² Rosen, ‘Hinxton’ VCH, *Cambridgeshire*, 6, 226

containing 8 acres.¹⁶³ By the eighteenth century there were apparently six sheepwalks for approximately 1400 sheep each walk having its own several heath and 206 acres of several heath in the south of the parish, is described as ancient enclosures in the Enclosure Award of 1846.¹⁶⁴

Discussion

South and east Cambridgeshire, with regard to the foldcourse, thus present a mixed picture. The foldcourse operated within an environment that in terms of settlement, size and number of fields and the distribution of holdings within those fields was similar to that of the Midlands. Cropping regimes, however, were similar to the foldcourse regions of Norfolk and Suffolk, whilst pasturing arrangements were primarily in manorial hands, though shack rights appear to have been more muted. The foldcourse was also clearly functioning in the region at an early date and was not a late introduction.

The persistence and survival of the foldcourse can be seen as one aspect of the innate conservatism of the owners and tenants. Cambridgeshire had a significant number of corporate (both collegiate and ecclesiastical) holdings - “the dead hand [of which] helped to stultify the land market” in the county.¹⁶⁵ Colleges in particular were “over-cautious and un-enterprising” managers of land; in addition, and over-lapping with the former was the number of absentee landlords.¹⁶⁶ But such conservatism was not confined to institutional holdings – both Hinxton and Fowlmere were in lay hands throughout the early modern period. The element that appears to be lacking - and this may be a result of the number of institutional holdings - is the presence of the entrepreneurs or flockmasters that were a feature of agricultural change in Norfolk and Suffolk in the sixteenth century. A further consequence of which is that, for Cambridgeshire, there are significantly fewer disputes over foldcourses, fold rights and their abuses; and perhaps this area is, overall, more comparable to other sheep-corn regions such as Wiltshire or Lincolnshire, rather than Norfolk and Suffolk. Sheep-corn husbandry thus survived in a stable and apparently unchanging pattern until enclosure which in many of the parishes discussed above did not happen until the middle of the nineteenth century.

¹⁶³ Keeling, Thriplow’ *VCH Cambridgeshire*, 8, 242; CRO 413/T5, B

¹⁶⁴ Keeling, Thriplow, 244; CRO Q/RDc/65

¹⁶⁵ Postgate, PhD, 290; Postgate, *Field Systems*, 312

¹⁶⁶ Postgate, PhD, 291, 152

4. SHEEP AND CORN: “ONE DOTH MINISTER UNTO THE OTHER”

4.1 Introduction

The foldcourse was a significant part of an agrarian environment characteristic of the light soil regions of the western part of East Anglia. That environment was also one which was, by the sixteenth century, increasingly divided between the sheep and corn elements of sheep-corn husbandry. Allison characterised the system as “mutually beneficial” to both landlord and tenant; albeit that the two elements were, predominantly, in different hands- the lord with his flocks and the tenants managing the arable.¹⁶⁷ This was also the case in Breckland where the development of a more rigid foldcourse system led to a lordly takeover of the foldcourse. There was not, however, a one size fits all model for a foldcourse, and as discussed in the previous section peasant sheep farming (cullet rights) co-existed with manorial flocks in a number of townships in the Good Sands country and though not without dispute and contention the ‘mutual benefits’ of sheep-corn husbandry continued.¹⁶⁸

The debate about the foldcourse often, inevitably, has focussed on the fold and flockmasters; the economics of which Allison catalogued in terms of wool, mutton and the “minor source of income” derived from the tathe.¹⁶⁹ The sheep or corn debate is however a false dichotomy. The arable element (in essence the tenants) tends to be excluded from that debate; and whilst the lords may not have profited directly from the arable, they received rental income from their tenants. Most lords appear to have followed the same approach as Sir Thomas Lestrangle in the sixteenth century at Hunstanton, whose interests are described as developing in parallel to the tenants, and that he “kept out of the...arable farming”.¹⁷⁰ The pairing of lord and tenant and their different interests in the two halves, as at Hunstanton - the lord with his flocks, the tenant with his crops – were connected by the ‘umbilical cord’ of the foldcourse. There was in this relationship significant mutual dependence: lords needed tenants for their rents - and caring or efficient lords probably got better tenants and higher rents; and their ‘co-operation’ in the operation of the foldcourse. Shannon who has characterised the landlord-tenant relationship as symbiotic also pointed out that “lords needed tenants”.¹⁷¹ Closer to home, the Lestranges had

¹⁶⁷ Allison, *Sheep-Corn Husbandry*, 22

¹⁶⁸ Bailey, *Sand into Gold*, 45, 55

¹⁶⁹ Allison, *Flock Management*, 106, 108

¹⁷⁰ Oestmann, 151

¹⁷¹ Shannon, W. M., ‘Risks and Rewards in Wasteland Enclosure: Lowland Lancashire’ in *Landlords and Tenants in Britain, 1440-1660*, ed Whittle J, Woodbridge, (2013), 165

by the early seventeenth century “to achieve a balance between their own interests and those” of their tenants; having “no option but to work with and trust their communities”, for they “could not afford to behave in an arbitrary” fashion.¹⁷² By the late seventeenth century, with the increase in leaseholds, the two elements were re-integrated in single hands. The clauses of the Lestrange estate leases, discussed later, specifying such aspects as crop rotations, how much muck is to be left for the infield, the cropping and rotations of the brecks, the tathing thereof and the size of the fold.¹⁷³ In this section I intend, through a detailed examination of a number of locations, to attempt to re-integrate the two halves of the sheep-corn equation into an overall pattern of agricultural practice.

The interest of a foldcourse owner in the two halves of sheep-corn husbandry is illustrated by a letter of c.1620. The correspondent is not identified (to my tin ear it reads like Henry Spelman) but it is addressed to “your Lord” and refers to a case in chancery which the unnamed lord is due to hear and the bundle of documents is concerned with enclosures (saffron grounds) in the open fields of South Creak. The writer characterises Norfolk as “annencyently bene and yet is champion & uninclosed”. However, that “many tenants and owners of lands within [the foldcourses] not respecting the common good of their country but seeking their owne private commodity have...by little and little enclosed great quantities of ground”. If not prevented this will lead to “the overthrowe of foldcourses” and become prejudicial “to the whole county the wealth thereof consisting chiefly in sheepe and corne. Each of these being mayntayned in the champion parts by such mutuall benefit of feed and compasture as respectively one of them doth minister unto the other”.¹⁷⁴ Clearly there is a strong element of special pleading on behalf of foldcourse owners in the letter, and that the profits of such owners must come first. It is also a call for the maintenance of the status quo with regard both to enclosure within the open fields and resistance to innovations such as growing saffron. The three defendants in the chancery case were all freeholders: John Harris having “sett with saffron five acres of his ground”; Richard Rolfe had enclosed seven roods; and William Collison three acres for the same crop.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷² Griffiths, E., ‘Improving Landlords or Villains of the Piece?’ in *Landlords and Tenants in Britain, 1440-1660*, ed Whittle J, Woodbridge, (2013), 176

¹⁷³ NRO LEST KA 12

¹⁷⁴ NRO BL/T/15/1/20

¹⁷⁵ NRO BL T/15/1/7

The Lestrange estates at Great Ringstead and Sedgford lie in the ‘Good Sands’ region; and by the mid-seventeenth century there was a regular pattern whereby the infield and outfield were separately farmed in cropping sequences that, in both cases included periods of extended fallows of varying duration. They also provide a good example of a number of the issues regarding the interaction of agriculture and the foldcourse, including the relationships between lord and tenant, the engrossing of cullet rights and the re-structuring of the outfields.

4.2 Great Ringstead

The outfields at Ringstead, which had grown in an organic fashion, underwent - in the mid-seventeenth century – several re-arrangements. The following discussion is based on two field books, one of the mid-sixteenth century and a second of 1620.¹⁷⁶ In both books the township was divided into south and north parts. The organic growth of the outfields is illustrated in Table 6.4 which summarises the furlongs of the south and north ‘partes of towne’ that were labelled as sheep’s pastures.¹⁷⁷ Of the eight sheep’s pastures in the north part, only one furlong is labelled as such (Lamcoates, no. 32) in both books. In the 1620 version from which the data in the tables is drawn, ‘shepes pasture’ is written in a different coloured ink alongside the entries for the other seven furlongs. All the furlongs were of variable size both in acreage and the number of parcels of land. The majority were made up of the demesne lands of several manors intermingled with tenant holdings, many of which were freeholds which were subsequently acquired by the Lestrange estate (see below). Two furlongs were, however, predominantly demesne: Larkatthe blackhirn (26) was divided into two ten acre plots held by Ramsey Abbey and ‘Sedgford’; and the latter held all of Wisletwonge (25) apart from seven roods of glebe land held by St. Peter’s church.¹⁷⁸ Ramsey Abbey also held a single block of 40 acres called Bonywonge in furlong 24.¹⁷⁹

There were, at this date two parishes in Great Ringstead. St Peters held 18½ acres of glebe land in the south, distributed across six of the eight furlongs; and 10 acres in the north in three furlongs. St Andrew’s church held glebe land in the north part only and in the same three furlongs as St Peter’s, totalling 3½ acres. The distribution of the glebe land – 23 parcels and

¹⁷⁶ NRO LEST/EH 2, EH 4

¹⁷⁷ NRO LEST/EH 4, 52 – 66, 172 - 178

¹⁷⁸ NRO LEST/EH 4, 55, 54

¹⁷⁹ NRO LEST/EH 4, 52

22 acres – is an indication of the comparative antiquity of the majority of the outfields or sheep’s pastures in the township.

Table 6.4: Summary of Sheep’s Pastures in South and North Fields of Great Ringstead (1620)

SOUTH				NORTH			
Furlong	Acres	Roods	Parcels	Furlong	Acres	Roods	Parcels
24	71		21	31	14		12
25	30	3	2	32	17	2	16
26	20		2	33	24		11
27	36	2	19	34	13		7
28	71		33	35	52*		34
29	91		33	36	38		17
30	27	3	26	37	22	3	3
31	52	3	23	38	55		29
TOTAL	420				236		

* The true total is larger as several entries are damaged.

The foregoing description is of the layout as it appears in the field books. However, given the disparity in size between some of the pastures the agrarian arrangements re-divided these pastures into eleven brecks, the brecks being composed of parcels from various sheep’s pastures or furlongs as set out in Table 6.5. They are described as “before they were altered” and whilst there is no certain date; the arrangements were in place by 1641 – that being the date alongside a South field entry for the crop regime.¹⁸⁰

There is still a wide range in the acreage of the individual brecks – particularly in the South field. How recent these changes were is unknown, but these may have been a first step away from the *ad hoc* arrangements previously described at Great Massingham (p. 163); or management by furlong on the Townshend estate as set out in Skayman’s book. They are also indicative of a more formalised, managerial control, given that to impose the changes across nearly 600 acres of land requires either a deal of persuasion or – as in this case – owning most of the land. For, the Lestranges were, at this time, acquiring significant amounts of lands in the outfields of Ringstead. There are, in the 1620 field book under the name Reade, a number of separate entries covering 70 acres in more than forty parcels in both of the town’s outfields.

¹⁸⁰ NRO LEST/ L 9

Table 6.5: South and North Field Brecks Prior to Alteration¹⁸¹

BRECK	SOUTH FIELD			NORTH FIELD		
	Furlong	parcels	Acres	furlong	parcels	Acres
1	29	1	28	)31	1-12	33
				)32	1-16	
2	24	1-21	72	) 29	28-37	28
				) 30	1-11	
3	25	1-2	31	) 28	9-11	39
				) 29	14-27	
				) 30	13-15	
4	27	1-19	37	) 29	14-16	23
				) 30	1-18	
5	28	1-25	37	38	1-9	27
6	) 29	19-37	35	37	1-3	23
	) 30	1-19				
7	) 29	2-18	47	36	1-17	38
	) 30	20-26				
8	) 29	1	38	35	1-18	38
	) 31	15-23				
9	28	26-36	27	33	2	27
10	26	1-2	20	) 33	1-11	25
				) 34	1-7	
11	31	1-14	24	35	19-27	17

For each entry the name is crossed out and ‘Dns’ (i.e. demesne) written over it and the date 1623 entered against the first.¹⁸² At the back of the field book are further entries summarising the “pasture lands” acquired from Mr Francis, also in 1623, consisting in total of 60 acres in five *quarentenae* in the South breck, and 67 acres in eight *quarentenae* in the North breck. In 1622 Hamon Lestrangle also bought 81½ acres in South and North fields from Dr Cadem. The brecks as set out above underwent further re-arrangement in the late 1640s (the document is undated but the subsequent page in the volume is dated 1649) and the diversity in size of the brecks was narrowed by transferring parcels of land in some furlongs from one breck to another whilst the total number of brecks remained the same. Thus the south brecks ranged from 20 to 40 acres and those in the north field from 23 to 38 acres.¹⁸³ This presumably eased the management complexity of having brecks composed of widely differing acreages. The document is set out by owners, rather than tenants and by breck - Lestrangle holding 552 acres and Bardolfs manor 64 acres, plus the glebe lands. The acquisitions set out above and no doubt

¹⁸¹ NRO LEST/L 9

¹⁸² NRO LEST/EH 4, 53

¹⁸³ NRO LEST/Q37, part1, 35

others meant that the holdings of the freeholders had been bought out. The Ringstead brecks were in tilth for four years, with a crop regime for both South and North brecks of summerlay, first, second and last crops; and therefore fallow for seven years.¹⁸⁴ This compares to Sedgeford where the cycle was four years' cropping four years' fallow. Whether seven years is indicative of the Ringstead brecks lying on poorer soils, or of a greater focus on sheep ranching is not clear and most likely both are correct to some degree.

Ringstead Foldcourses

These acquisitions and re-laying out of the outfields were not conducted in isolation, and the last changes occurred at the same time as an agreement, in 1650, between the Lestranges and the inhabitants of the township with regard to the operation of the two foldcourses and thereby replacing the former customary rights. The 'inhabitants' (or more accurately certain tenants) had until that date "rights to lay sheep by way of union and mixt and joint depasturage had enjoyed of ancient use and right time out of mind".¹⁸⁵ The tenant's right - to have 300 sheep in each of the two foldcourses - was based "for and in consideration of their right to feed [on] the...common called the East Ling or Sheeps Ling". This right of at least some tenants, with regard to the sheep's ling, was 'attached' to their tenement holdings: it being granted by the lord that "inhabitants with sheep rights...have the right to lay sheep by reasonable rate with regard to the quantity of their severall tenancies".¹⁸⁶ Lestrangle had 400 sheep in each of the same foldcourses for his right to depasture all the sheep pasture lands and liberty of shack on the infield. The remaining 100 head in each were the shepherds' rights.

By the agreement the Lestranges were to have, in the North foldcourse "sole and entire power privilege and liberty and feed for 700 sheep".¹⁸⁷ In the south foldcourse the changes are less clear cut: in one statement the Lestranges were to have a further 100 in the flock.¹⁸⁸ They further claimed, "in right of...tenements" and 140 acres of arable that they had acquired, "a proportional number of sheep" in the South foldcourse.¹⁸⁹ It is not clear whether the 100 head is the proportional number or not; but another document concerning the Ringstead foldcourses states that Lestrangle was "to lay 100 or about 60 or 70 more" for land recently purchased.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁴ NRO LEST/Q 37, part 1, 35; LEST/ L 9

¹⁸⁵ NRO LEST/FF 2, 1

¹⁸⁶ NRO LEST/FF 2, 2

¹⁸⁷ NRO LEST/FF 2, 3

¹⁸⁸ NRO LEST/FF 2,4

¹⁸⁹ NRO LEST/FF 2,2

¹⁹⁰ NRO LEST/Q 37, 30

Overall, the Lestranges had increased their flocks by 300 in the North foldcourse, and perhaps 200 in the South.

The tenants of Ringstead had, until the changes outlined above, a significant proportion of the total number of sheep in the two foldcourses. The details of the numbers they were allowed with regard to the north foldcourse, were set out in an order of the manor court of Ringstead with Holme, dated 1598 and copied into the 1620 field book. Previous arguments had concerned “the rate and proportion of the agistment of sheep” on the north foldcourse which “certayne...tenants overcharged” and “by consent” a new rate was made. The copy includes a list of the messuages and tenements – 32 in total – with a right to put sheep in the fold and the number each was allowed. Overall the majority (21) had an agistment in single figures, ten of which were for four sheep. The largest was held by Robert Read who had two messuages and a flock of 100.¹⁹¹ It is probable but not certain that this is the same Reade whose land was acquired in 1623.

Lord and Tenants

Clearly, Lestrangle had significantly increased his control of the foldcourses at Ringstead. The agreement also addressed the infield shack period: laying down the minimum size of the parcels of land in the infield so that the flocks “ought not to receive any disturbance or impediment or be any ways hindered in the quiet and peaceable...depasturing” of the lands. The inhabitants were required to leave a minimum of ten acres in a furlong or two furlongs next to each other.¹⁹² This did not, however, apply to winter corn which the tenants could “sow at their will and pleasure”.¹⁹³ The first ‘clause’ is clearly ‘doing what it says’ but is also presumably to address the issue of sowing out of course in order to disrupt the quiet and peaceable feeding of the flock. In effect, each tenant or group of tenants had to lay down a minimum of ten acres to a course. If the courses were all spring sown (as they were in the outfield) it would have little practical impact on individuals; but the second ‘clause’ implies some winter sowing but perhaps a minimal area given that a minimum acreage is not set down. Similar arrangements

¹⁹¹ NRO LEST/EH 4

¹⁹² NRO LEST/FF 2, 9

¹⁹³ NRO LEST/FF 2, 11

were made at Holme, with regard to the outfield in 1674, whereby those with lands lying in the foldcourse were to sow in course, and “not to sowe lesse than 3 acres in a piece”.¹⁹⁴

The number of tenants with cullet rights had clearly been reduced by engrossment but, overall, they did gain some benefits by the agreement - though a number of these represent the formalisation of previous customary rights. One, and probably the most important, was the tathing of the brecks prior to tillage: “the lands of the... inhabitants coming into course...to be yearly well and seasonably compassed and double tathed” by the flocks “before 25th of August and single tathed before 1st November”. The inhabitants paid 12d for every acre that was tathed, which as discussed above appears to have been a reasonable rate. In addition it specifies that no land out of the brecks was to be tathed at any time by the sheep in hurdles.¹⁹⁵ It was further agreed that the inhabitants “shall not plow arre or break up” any part of either the sheep’s ling or the neates ling for “private use and benefit”.¹⁹⁶ The latter is referred to as common but the sheep’s ling which lay to the east of the south field brecks and covered 311 acres was, in part at least, several and it was laid down that both flocks “shall...have passage to the feed of the proper & respective & several part of the sheeps ling according to metes and bounds”.¹⁹⁷ The neates ling (or short ling of c.80 acres¹⁹⁸) which was to the south bordering Sedgeford was to be preserved sole and entire for the feed and benefit of the neat beasts and horses of the inhabitants”.¹⁹⁹ The agreement also documented the provision of exchanges of land and costs for tenants whose land was to lay long in the sheep’s pasture, as discussed above.

4.3 Sedgeford

The crop regime of the Sedgeford West Hall infield lands was documented for the years 1702 – 1733, by which time the majority of the land was inclosed, the land being predominantly in tilth under a rotation that included clover and turnips, with occasional breaks of a year when the closes were laid to grass. However, West Hall also had a small quantity of open-field lands described as 4¼ acres Field land, 1½ acres in Heacham field and 11½ acres of Shortlands furlong. The sequence of cropping for these open-field parcels still included extended fallowing

¹⁹⁴ NRO LEST/P 20, 98

¹⁹⁵ NRO LEST/FF 2, 9

¹⁹⁶ NRO LEST/FF 2, 11

¹⁹⁷ NRO LEST/EH 8, 4 & 5; LEST/FQ 20; LEST/FF 2, 11

¹⁹⁸ NRO LEST/ OD – map of Ringstead (1625), acreage based on dimensions of ling compared to closes whose acreage is given.

¹⁹⁹ NRO LEST/EH 8, 4 & 5; LEST/FF 2,11

and whilst the rotations varied over the years they were predominantly wheat, barley, peas, barley, two years grass and then summerlay.²⁰⁰ The insertion of a season of peas between two crops of barley is perhaps of some antiquity, and elsewhere, the Lestranges specifically banned two successive years of barley cropping – as for example at two of their farms at Heacham c.1700.²⁰¹ Therefore, at Sedgeford the open infield lands were ‘rested’ for the best part of three years before preparation and four years of cropping. The leases on the Lestrangle estate appear to have recognised the local variation in soils. A 1684 lease for Sedgeford East Hall specifies that the tenant shall “not take above four crops together upon the infield before he shall lay the same to grass”.²⁰² Similarly at Ringstead in 1683 the tenant was not to take more than four crops.²⁰³ At Sedgeford Hall (presumably West Hall) in 1690 the tenant was allowed five crops in any one course.²⁰⁴

In 1631 a “breck book” was written detailing the number of brecks and their cropping regime.²⁰⁵ There were three sets of brecks: South field, North pasture and East field; each of which was divided into eight brecks, and each set of eight followed a regular cropping cycle, consisting of summerlay, then three croppings followed by four years’ fallow. (Table 6.6) In addition the pattern across the three groups of brecks at Sedgeford is staggered, so that in any given year whilst each group has three brecks in cultivation, they are not at the same stage in the cycle. (Table 6.7) The brecks were described in almost all cases as part of a numbered furlong and were used in a flexible fashion. A number of annotations dated 1641 state that pieces of land totalling 40 acres in the second, third and fifth brecks in East field shall be “laid into the infield”; and “it is intended that this [five acres] shall lye continuously for the sheep”.²⁰⁶ The cropping regime of the brecks can, for 1694, be reconstructed from a lease for the North foldcourse and brecks which required the tenant to leave one breck in winter corn stubble, one in pea stubble and one in barley stubble; and an agreement of 1600/01 specified that newly ploughed brecks at Sedgeford should only be sown with wheat or rye.²⁰⁷

²⁰⁰ NRO LEST/IB91

²⁰¹ NRO LEST/KA 14 15,19

²⁰² NRO LEST/KA 12, 8

²⁰³ NRO LEST/FH 3

²⁰⁴ NRO LEST/KA 12, 1

²⁰⁵ NRO LEST/IC 58

²⁰⁶ NRO LEST/IC 58

²⁰⁷ NRO LEST/KA 14, 54; DCN 59/30/10

Table 6.6: Cropping Regime South Field Brecks 1631 – 1642

	BRECK							
YEAR	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1631	last crop	2 nd crop	1 st crop	somerlay	Fallow	Fallow	Fallow	Fallow
1632	Fallow	last crop	2 nd crop	1 st crop	somerlay	Fallow	Fallow	Fallow
1633	Fallow	Fallow	last crop	2 nd crop	1 st crop	somerlay	Fallow	Fallow
1634	Fallow	Fallow	fallow	last crop	2 nd crop	1 st crop	Somerlay	Fallow
1635	Fallow	Fallow	fallow	Fallow	last crop	2 nd crop	1 st crop	Somerlay
1636	Somerlay	Fallow	fallow	Fallow	Fallow	last crop	2 nd crop	1 st crop
1637	1 st crop	somerlay	fallow	Fallow	Fallow	Fallow	last crop	2 nd crop
1638	2 nd crop	1 st crop	somerlay	Fallow	Fallow	Fallow	Fallow	last crop
1639	last crop	2 nd crop	1 st crop	somerlay	Fallow	Fallow	Fallow	Fallow
1640	Fallow	last crop	2 nd crop	1 st crop	somerlay	Fallow	Fallow	Fallow
1641	Fallow	Fallow	last crop	2 nd crop	1 st crop	somerlay	Fallow	Fallow
1642	Fallow	Fallow	fallow	last crop	2 nd crop	1 st crop	Somerlay	Fallow

Table 6.7: Cropping Regime across the Three Sets of Brecks in 1631

	BRECK							
SET	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
South field	last crop	2 nd crop	1 st crop	Somerlay				
North pasture			last crop	2 nd crop	1 st crop	somerlay		
East field					last crop	2 nd crop	1 st crop	Somerlay

The landholdings in the brecks at Sedgeford in 1644 (Table 6.8) are concentrated in manorial hands – but to a lesser extent than at Ringstead. Lestrangle held 63% of the north brecks, the remainder being divided between seven holders, and over 80% of the land in the south breck. The majority of other owners held land in one or other set of brecks.²⁰⁸ A note at the end of the ‘breck book’ describes the making (or breaking) of a new set of brecks in the East field, on the south side of the way from Sedgeford to Docking. Six parcels of land are listed, each of between 30 and 55 acres, to be broken sequentially from 1631 to 1636; these lands having previously “been laid continuously for the sheep and have yielded no other profit”.²⁰⁹ In a similar fashion to the brecks at Ringstead, the East brecks were re-arranged. They had varied in size from 67 to 20 acres but by 1641 consisted of seven of 40 acres and one of 43 acres. Subsequently they were made even neater when three acres were “taken out” of the 43 acre breck and “laid to Ringstead south foldcourse”. An action made easier by Lestrangle holding all bar two acres of the East brecks.²¹⁰

²⁰⁸ NRO LEST/IB 90

²⁰⁹ NRO LEST/IC 58

²¹⁰ NRO LEST/IB 90

Sedgeford Foldcourses

The Parliamentary survey of 1649 describes Sedgeford as divided between two manors – Westhall and Easthall – the arable lands of which lie “intermingled and undivided with customary and other lands and distinguished into infield lands and the brecks”.²¹¹ The infield was not to “lye long” for the sheep - unlike the brecks. There were two foldcourses – one for each manor - for 1200 sheep; which were to be kept “partly upon the common” which was 100 acres; partly upon the shack of the arable ground, “whether customary ffreehold or demesne”; and also on the “unplowed ground of the brecks...to lye long for the pasture of the said sheep”.²¹²

Table 6.8: Landholdings and Distribution in the North and South Brecks

LANDOWNER	North		South	
	acres	No. of brecks	Acres	No. of brecks
The Lord	309	All	348	All
Hamon Lestrangle			140	7
John Lawes	35	6	2	1
Henry Minnes	10	4	7	3
Robert Banyard	33	7		
M Gurling	6	2		
M Waters	2	3		
Rich’d Banyard heirs	3	2		
Robert Rose			45	6
John Ellgar			25	4
William Banyard			25	4
Sedgefords	93	All	1	1
Total	491		593	

²¹¹ NRO DCN 51/91, 2

²¹² NRO DCN 51/91, 6

5. IMPROVING THE OUTFIELD

Clay suggests that, given the farming techniques available in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, it was not until the latter part of the seventeenth century that saw “the beginnings” of attempts to extend arable cultivation to “under-utilized lands” such as “the sandy soils in many areas [that were] too poor and thin” for crops, and were utilised “as rough sheep pasture”.²¹³ I have discussed above the use of the term ‘sheep’s pasture’ and the way in which in East Anglia it had a more flexible meaning than the author ascribes to it. This section describes the attempts by some landlords to ‘improve’ the value and benefit of their sheep’s pastures. Whilst the evidence is predominantly from the mid-seventeenth century it can also, I would suggest, be applied to earlier efforts, and represents the culmination of many years of development.

It is clear that by the seventeenth century the Lestranges were taking specific steps to ‘improve’ their outfields. Their leases, for example lay down specific requirements as to the tathing of the brecks. At Barrett Ringstead in 1668 the lessee was to “well and sufficiently tath [with 700 sheep] all such breck belonging to the said foldcourse as shall yearly come in course to be sown”.²¹⁴ Similar conditions were laid down in a number of other late seventeenth-century leases. At Sedgeford Hall the lessee was to tathe with the fold of 700 sheep all the summerlay breck and to double tathe 16 acres (for wheat?), the remainder being single tathed presumably.²¹⁵ The lessee of the Manor Farm flock at Heacham was to “tathe so much of the brecks and claylands as shall be summertilled with his flock of 700 sheep”.²¹⁶ The lessee of the North foldcourse and brecks in Sedgeford was to tath as much of the breck as can be compassed before Michaelmas with a fold of 500 sheep. In this instance the lessee was also to muck five acres yearly with at least twelve loads per acre.²¹⁷ At Titchwell, in the mid-seventeenth century, the brecks were tathed or double tathed, which “holds [th]e groundes in heart...for three years without any more tathing or mucking”; and in a second version, the break lands when “double tathed will keep the ground in heart to sow itt 3 yeares next after without anymore tathing”.²¹⁸ Such success was based not only on the application of tathe – for the latter in such light soils would have, of itself, been ‘washed out’ by rain - but also on the effect of the four or more

²¹³ Clay, C. G. A., *Economic Expansion and Social Change: England 1500-1700*, 1, Cambridge, (1984), 111

²¹⁴ NRO LEST/FH 2

²¹⁵ NRO LEST/KA 12

²¹⁶ NRO LEST/KA 14, 21

²¹⁷ NRO LEST/KA 14, 54

²¹⁸ NRO MC 1256/1, 808x8, 54, 105

years that the brecks had been laid to grass, which would have helped to bind both nutrients and water and allow for the successive cropping that followed the fallow period. In the previous chapter I discussed the ecology of heathlands and the issues of grazing density viz-a-viz the shifting balance between heath and grassland depending on the number of sheep. English Nature consider that 2.7 sheep/hectare is the limit above which *Calluna* heath will become grassland, which is equivalent to 1.1 per acre.²¹⁹ The implication from the discussion above with regard to the regulated use of the outfields is that in some places they were, in the seventeenth century, grazed at an intensity to promote the development of grasslands. Does the information available indicate that this was so?

At Sedgeford the survey of 1649 states that there were two foldcourses, each with 600 sheep.²²⁰ The acreages of each breck were respectively: north 500 acres, south 590 acres; and east 320 acres and at any one time four of the eight brecks were down to grass.²²¹ The density of sheep on the north foldcourse was thus 2.4 per acre, and 2 per acre on the south course. This level of grazing intensity would certainly produce a land more akin to grassland than heath. The other sources of feed for the two flocks would have been the post-harvest shack, and “partly upon the common [of] 100 acres” – and is unlikely to significantly reduce the intensity of grazing of the brecks.²²² However, by 1705 farm leases indicate that grazing (and manuring) intensity had increased on all three brecks. West Hall farm had a flock of 500 ewes and four brecks in the south ground in tilth – leaving four in grass. The four are said to be “about 180 acres”, giving a density of 2.8 sheep per acre when on the breck land. The North Ground farm included four brecks and a flock of 400 wethers. Assuming the same acreage as West Hall farm, the density is 2.2 per acre. East Hall farm included four brecks in the East ground totalling 120 acres and a flock of 800 ewes, the density of sheep on the East brecks was 6.6 sheep per acre.²²³

Similar calculations for Ringstead, c.1650, where there were 800 sheep in each foldcourse; two brecks (the north was 319 acres in extent and the south 328 acres), of which seven individual brecks were fallow in any one year; give a density of four sheep per acre.²²⁴ The flocks did however also have further feed on the East Ling which was 311 acres in extent and to which

²¹⁹ Lake *et al*, 42

²²⁰ NRO DCN 51/91

²²¹ NRO LEST/ IB 90

²²² NRO DCN 51/91

²²³ NRO LEST/ IB 91

²²⁴ NRO LEST/ FF 2, 3; LEST/Q 37, part 1, 35

both flocks “shall...have passage to the feed of the proper & respective & several part of the sheeps ling according to metes and bounds”.²²⁵ Whether the whole East Ling was several is unclear but it would add significant extra feed for the flocks.

Given these density figures which are at least twice the suggested maximum for maintaining a heath-like environment; the outfields of Sedgeford and Ringstead are far more likely to have resembled grassland than heath. This makes the specific provisions for the protection of whins to provide shelter for the flocks discussed previously even more necessary. The data also suggests that, in 1705 at least, the east brecks at Sedgeford were being ‘severely’ improved – see also the comment with regard to the varying quality of the brecks below. References to heathland at Sedgeford are rare in the early modern period, which is perhaps not surprising as the 1625 map indicates that the outfields butt up against the township boundaries and the copy of Haiward’s map of Ringstead brecks shows Sedgeford East Brecks immediately to the south of the parish boundary.²²⁶

That these efforts to improve the outfields led to success was also noted at the time. At Fring, in 1638, the “common, high ground of which the towne hath no profit...but the lord having the sweepe and feede of it for his foldcourse, it helps to make his sheeps pasture equivalent to the infield”. An opinion re-enforced by the fact that the 1342 acres of arable (682 acres infield and 660 acres sheep’s pasture) were “all one price”.²²⁷ A letter of 1723, regarding the arable at Sedgeford describes the infield land as “a perfect Good Tempered Cleane Soile for Corn”. The writer goes on to draw distinctions between the quality of the three brecks: the south set being “in an equality to [th]e infield in value”; whilst the north brecks were “tolerable barley land”; and those in the east “are very proper to improve and have laid a pritty while”.²²⁸

The question arises as to whether the approach of the Lestranges was particular to their estate. The answer may be that the sheep densities above are common. I noted earlier that calculations concerning stints at both Saffron Walden in 1385 and Chippenham in 1544 were based on three sheep per acre, and at the latter this refers specifically to the fallow.²²⁹ The same density applied

²²⁵ NRO LEST/ FF 2, 3; LEST/FQ 20; LEST/FF 2, 11

²²⁶ NRO LEST/OC 1; LEST/OB 6

²²⁷ NRO LEST/L8/6

²²⁸ NRO DCN 59/30/2

²²⁹ Cromarty, 13; Spufford, Cambridgeshire Community, 43

to the pastures of the Crabs Castle foldcourse at Wighton.²³⁰ Furthermore, in a letter of 1683 from William Bassett to Sir Nicholas Lestrange concerning sheep feeding at Ringstead, three per acre is described as the “custom of the country”.²³¹ The terms ‘feed’ and ‘depasture’ are somewhat ambiguous. Feeding can be the sheep taking their feed from wherever they are, or depasturing as it is often described. In practice of course the sheep are double tasking - both consuming feed and manuring the land in a casual fashion. The flocks would also have spent much longer on the shack, pastures in outfield or brecks, and commons than in a fold. The figure of three per acre as the carrying capacity of those lands suggest that experience and observation in the past had arrived at this level as sustainable for the soils and vegetation. There may even have been a degree of positive feedback with the flocks improving the pasture feed and allowing for more sheep to be supported as is indicated by the contrasting figure of two per acre, for the fallow stint on the Wiltshire estate of St Swithuns Priory c.1300; whilst other stints for lowland England from the medieval period were similar or less.²³²

The system that developed on the Lestrange estates and elsewhere in the Good Sands region involved the careful management, regular cropping of both infield and outfield, the employment of extended fallowing in both zones and the significant role of the foldcourse. The principal impact was in the expansion of the acreage, primarily in the outfield; any improvement in the quality of the land in tilth was probably highly localised. Thus yields per acre were not significantly changed but the total cropped acreage was. A further consequence of the infield and outfield being brought into closer alignment was to raise sheep-corn husbandry in the region to a more intense and productive level than in areas such as Wiltshire or the Wolds.

²³⁰ Whyte, *Perceptions of the Norfolk Landscape*, 189

²³¹ NRO LEST/P 20, 104

²³² Harrison, B., ‘Field Systems and Demesne Farming on the Wiltshire Estates of St. Swithun’s Priory, Winchester, 1248-1340’, *Agric Hist Reiew*, 43.1 (1995) 6

6. HOW DID IT WORK?

How the infield, outfield and foldcourse were organised at a more detailed level is less well documented but there are a number of clues. Given the efforts made to improve the brecks on the Lestrange estates with the fold, it is questionable to what extent the fold was employed on the infield. This was clearly not the case in many places – as at Flempton where the activity during summerlay specifies that different areas were to be tathed either with the cart or the fold.²³³ The carting of manure would have been widely employed on the infield – as at Titchwell (p.278) - and it appears in this example that the fold was not used on the infield, which may be a reflection of soil quality or arguments over the cost of the fold. The Norwich Cathedral Priory flocks were c.1500, as recorded by the shepherds, employed in several different ways: at Sedgeford 30 acres were “simply manured”, whilst 25 acres were manured “with flock and fold”; at Fring 15s was paid for manuring “by fold with hurdles”.²³⁴ These descriptions are, perhaps, a gradation in complexity and cost. Unfortunately, the acreage is not given for the land at Fring with which to compare the cost but the examples do indicate the variety of ways in which manuring was undertaken.

At Cockley Cley in the Brecklands, in 1708, “the infield land was not fed by the sheep from May Day to Lammas, during which time the townes men” put their cattle on it – presumably this is referring to the fallow. At Lammas the sheep come into the infield and feed [but not folded?] till it be sowne viz after March 3rd”.²³⁵ An eighteenth-century ‘Custom of the Sheepwalk’, also from Cockley Cley says that the flock will “feed the summerlay field from three weeks and three days before Michaelmas to Lammas following once in three years”. The flock is therefore on the summerlay, which will be the next seasons winter sowing, for most of the year apparently. The flock was also to take the winter corn shack or feed three weeks and three days before Michaelmas and feed it till May Day if not sown” – it is unclear as to whether this is one flock or two.²³⁶

A number of leases also differentiate between manuring from a cart and using the fold. At Eaton Farm, Sedgeford a lease refers to “12 acres of winter corne stubble muckt year before”, at Westgate farm, Holme nine acres of “somertild in 4th earth” was to be mucked with at least

²³³ SROB 449/9/12

²³⁴ Bailey, M., ‘The Sheep Accounts of Norwich Cathedral Priory 1484 to 1534’ in *Poverty and Wealth*, Norfolk Record Society, 71, (2007), 37, 42, 57

²³⁵ NRO MC 2667/14, 1

²³⁶ NRO MC 2667/19, 6, 991x2

10 lds [loads] of good horse or cows muck to an acre.²³⁷ A lease of 1708 at Hilborough required the tenant to “leave 24 acres of the infield lands to be somertilled and plowed...for the convenience of laying on the cart muck...from the premises”, whilst the flocks were “to ffould all the fflocks...to feed ffoldcourse and sheepwalke...some part of the arable land and breaks from midsummer day to Christmas day”.²³⁸

The following is a suggestion as to how the flock and the fold and the land may have interacted. It is based on much of the foregoing but the discussion is intended as a general overview relevant perhaps more to the Good Sands region than the Brecklands and assumes an arrangement somewhat like that at Sedgeford with a two-year fallow of the open infield, and four years fallow in the outfield.

Beginning at Michaelmas - the start of the farming year - the flock would, initially have fed on the post-harvest shack of the infield and those brecks that had been cropped. At the end of the shack period the flock would move, perhaps to the infield second year fallow, and/or the brecks that had been down to grass more than one year. Pastures such as the Sheep’s ling at Ringstead could also feed the flock, and at Cockley Cley they also had the East and West Meadows “to feed them [is them the sheep or the meadows or, in reality, both?] from shack time till 3 days after May Day”.²³⁹

The flock may have been folded on winter sown crop and then spring sown crop during the winter and early spring; but many of the leases above imply that folding was a spring and summer activity on the summerlay of infield and outfield as much as, if not more so, than a winter one. This would make sense in that the sequence of folding, ploughing and sowing would be co-ordinated and the value of the winter folding less likely to be reduced by rainfall and not being ploughed in. In either case the flock would have rotated between the lands being folded or the ‘pastures’ being fed.

It is likely that, after the shack period was finished, the first year fallows of both in and outfield were closed to the flock until after the next harvest to allow the development of sufficient grass and herbage for feed in subsequent years. In the second year of grass on the breck, the flock

²³⁷ NRO LEST/KA 14, 58; LEST/KA 14, 41

²³⁸ NRO HIL 3/1, 878x9

²³⁹ NRO MC 2667/14, 1

may have fed on it or kept off for it to develop further. In the subsequent years it would have been fed by and provided feed for the flock. This is a possible cycle for one breck, but at the same time there would be others at different points in the cycle.

7. CONCLUSIONS

The foldcourse is usually seen simply as a regional version of sheep-corn husbandry, which was common to a number of light soil regions of England that needed the fold to maintain soil fertility. But why was the foldcourse apparently exclusive to East Anglia? The answer to this question and the explanation for the differences between the foldcourse and sheep-corn husbandry cannot be framed in monocausal terms. The foldcourse was a complex system of interactions between the environment, social structures and agrarian practices. Thus aspects such as soils, settlements, field systems, manorial rights, and social structures are all involved and inter-related with the foldcourse. The foldcourse also needs to be seen not simply as a form of sheep-corn husbandry, but also as being intimately connected with infield-outfield agriculture.

The pre-conditions for the foldcourse can be summarised as follows. The foldcourse was a feature of areas of marginal and usually acidic soils in East Anglia, soils which often varied over short distances in a mosaic pattern; whilst other forms of sheep-corn husbandry were predominantly located on more alkaline calcareous soils. The foldcourse operated in regions with open field within which the individual holdings of the tenants were scattered, not clustered. The precise nature of the open fields was not critical: the foldcourse was present both in the Midland-like large fields of south-east Cambridgeshire; whilst elsewhere it was in what is perhaps best described as a collection of furlongs, rather than well defined 'fields'. The settlement pattern associated with the foldcourse was one of nucleation. However, as with the field systems, the degree of nucleation varied both spatially and temporally from the strongly nucleated settlements of south-east Cambridgeshire, to a pattern in west Norfolk and Suffolk often of a looser agglomeration of "polyfocal" settlements, which often became more nucleated over time. Both the field systems and settlement patterns associated with the foldcourse are perhaps better defined by what they were not rather than what they were. Thus, in regions of dispersed settlement and clustered holdings - that were also suitable for sheep-corn husbandry, for example the Sandlings - such conditions appear to have hindered, or been antagonistic to, the development or operation of the foldcourse.

Infield-outfield agriculture was an important and not previously fully understood part of the foldcourse regime. Topographically, foldcourse rights were often confined to the outfield; and, in those townships with several foldcourses, they were clearly separated one from another.

Foldcourse rights also need to be distinguished from the rights of shackle over the infield that manorial lords and tenants enjoyed. This is not to say that shack rights were not abused on many occasions, but the distinction was recognised and adhered to in the majority of locations.

Infield-outfield agriculture was a widespread technique across the light soil regions of both the Good Sands region and the Breckland; the outfields operating under a variety of descriptors, including breck, sheep's pasture, olland and herdgong. In a number of locations it is also clear that, based on the presence of glebe lands, the outfields were of considerable antiquity. In Sedgeford, they had been incorporated into the regular agricultural practice by the end of the thirteenth century; though in most townships outfields were probably used on an *ad hoc* basis until the sixteenth century.

The outfield was, furthermore, the location of exchanges of land or other compensation by manorial lords to their tenants. The reason for this unusual generosity and why it was confined to the outfield was that areas of the outfield were, as part of the crop rotation, left fallow for extended periods (commonly four years or more). Those tenants, who had outfield lands that could not be laid to crops for the fallow period, were compensated by the lord. The benefit to the lord of these arrangements was that the period of extended fallow provided the flocks with areas to feed off and to manure. There is no evidence, however, that such generosity ever extended to the infield; nor would one expect it to be present as part of a regular cropping rotation.

The cropping regimes in the Good Sands and Breckland regions often involved significant periods of extended fallowing of both infield and outfield arable. Conventional three-course rotations were rare, if not non-existent; as was a repetitive cycle of one year crop, one year fallow. The purpose – based on the knowledge accumulated over many years of observation and experience – was to improve the condition of the soils. Extending the fallow period improved the structure of the soil and thereby the retention of nutrients and moisture - an important requirement in a region of easily draining soils and low rainfall. It also allowed for the development of better plant cover that provided improved grazing for the flocks when compared to the same fallow over a one year period. Given the numbers of sheep involved by the early modern period, it is probable that in many places areas of the heathland more closely resembled grasslands.

The extent to which, there was, in effect, a division between the infield of tenants and corn, and an outfield of lords and sheep, may be important. It is a division reflected in crop regimes, the manuring of the infield – with the tenants willingness or otherwise to purchase the tathe as opposed to manuring with the cart; and in the degree of manorial control, and often ownership, of the outfields. Tenants clearly had lands in and farmed the outfield and co-operated in the management thereof, but presumably their primary interest was in their infield lands – their fertility and improvement. This division may also have reduced the tensions around the social issues raised by the foldcourse in the early modern period.

The foldcourse and infield-outfield agriculture were thus intimately connected, and in the Good Sands region the regime of foldcourse and extended fallowing developed, during the early modern period on some estates, into a carefully managed and sophisticated regime of integrated arable and pasture production; and one far removed from both the traditional sheep-corn husbandry, and the various forms of infield-outfield agriculture, of other English regions. Thus, the foldcourse in effect encompassed two types of agriculture systems: sheep-corn husbandry, with which it is commonly associated; and infield-outfield; to produce a more effective operation than either component alone.

The foldcourse was not an ‘automatic’ manorial right and in those multi-manorial townships examined there was a connection between the possession of a foldcourse and Domesday estates. This would suggest that the origin of the foldcourse pre-dates the Norman Conquest; a view that is supported by the inclusion of the duty of ‘foldsoke’ in Domesday Book; the entries for which are confined to Norfolk and Suffolk. The inclusion of foldsoke in Domesday may also be connected to questions of Lordship in the region and indicative of the need to incorporate the freemen and sokemen concerned into the new tenurial regime by whatever means were available. It is clear that rights such as liberty of fold were widespread, principally amongst freemen in the medieval period; and indeed survived, in Norfolk at least, into the early modern period in the form of cullet rights. Over time the foldcourse evolved, moving from a diverse system of demesne and individual free folds in the medieval period to one under a more direct manorial control in the sixteenth century.

The foldcourse was confined to wider East Anglia but in those areas where it had been part of the agricultural practice for many years, it was not a standardized or monolithic’ system – as indicated by its wide employment and variable pre-conditions. By the sixteenth century it had

also become a cause of dispute and legal arguments in these areas. The ‘foldcourse’ also became a term that was used more widely and loosely in East Anglia in the same period; and in the innovative way of the region was used by manorial lords in some places in an attempt to introduce, or aggregate more power and control to themselves, and such actions were the cause of more disputes.

The sheep-corn husbandry of other regions predominantly met the physical requirements discussed above: it occurred in regions with open fields and nucleated settlements, but there was a clearer, and sometimes topographical, division between arable and upland pasture. In addition, sheep-corn husbandry and infield-outfield agriculture were not employed in partnership as in some parts of East Anglia. Traditional sheep-corn husbandry, as practised in Wiltshire, operated in an environment that was both strongly manorial and communal and individual operations appear to be rare by the early modern period.¹ Versions of free folding and similar practices did exist in the medieval period, but were almost certainly less common than in East Anglia; and the degree to which they were the equivalent of “liberty of fold” in the latter region is doubtful. This combination – in particular the high degree of communal involvement, the presence and persistence of common flocks, the control of the farming regime through the manorial courts – was absent in the foldcourse regions of East Anglia.

By contrast, the farming regime of the foldcourse region of East Anglia took a more individualistic approach – an approach not confined to one period, or one class. In the medieval period, freemen and other tenants with fold rights appear to have operated as individuals not as a separate group or in common with other tenants. The rise of the flockmasters with their entrepreneurial approach - including the abuse of their manorial power – was also centred on a group of individuals, albeit with more power than the freemen. Thus, once the shift pattern had been set (and one wonders how often in practice it changed) the overall approach was the minimum necessary with regard to communal activity. A consequence of these social aspects, and a further distinction between sheep-corn husbandry and the foldcourse system is that the absence of common flocks in the latter converted the value of the tathe of the sheepfold from a common resource into a commodity.

¹ Appendix 1, 341

The foldcourse was a complex system that in some aspects was inimical to the prevailing 'individualistic' attitudes of the East Anglian region, and was typical of medieval and early modern farming systems in its intricate and complex relationship between soils, settlements, fields systems and social structures. The foldcourse, during its 'climax' period - before developments such as the Norfolk four-course rotation in the eighteenth century, - merged two agricultural systems into a more effective third. Whilst the foldcourse is still not fully elucidated, this thesis will hopefully remove some of the misconceptions that have gathered around it.

APPENDIX ONE: SHEEP-CORN HUSBANDRY

1. Introduction

This appendix examines the role of sheep-corn husbandry, of which the foldcourse is generally seen as a regional version, in English farming – its nature and function, the role of the fold, and its distribution. Following this initial overview, the discussion will primarily focus on the chalk downs and in particular those of Wiltshire.

2. The Agrarian Role of Sheep-corn Husbandry

Sheep-corn husbandry consisted, in essence, of a cycle whereby sheep were fed by day on hill pastures and heaths and by night were folded, using hurdles, on the arable fields in order to manure them. It was, in the medieval period, one of the more extensive types of mixed farming - extensive both in its geographical distribution but also in its need for wide areas of pasture.¹ Campbell described it as “a particularly cost effective method of maintaining the fertility of lighter soils”, such soils being easy to work but in need of regular manuring.² The only realistic alternative prior to the introduction of eighteenth-century improvements such as clover and root crops and still later the use of artificial fertilizers, was the labour intensive distribution of farmyard manures by cart. As Thirsk has pointed out - sheep-corn husbandry, whilst it is “always described” as an arable regime, the sheep fold was the critical element in what she characterised as “an elegantly neat system” for the maintenance and improvement of grain yields.³ For Kerridge, writing with characteristic force, the sheep fold was “the sheet anchor of husbandry” – by implication all husbandry, but presumably of the sheep-corn system, given that he is writing about the Chalk Country of Wiltshire and Hampshire.⁴

All plant growth requires appropriate levels of water, light and nutrients.⁵ Sheep-corn husbandry is designed both to address and maintain the last of these needs, the essential nutrients being added to the soil by the faeces and urine produced by the sheep in the fold and which consist of nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium.⁶ In the pre-industrial era there were only

¹ Campbell, *English Seigniorial Agriculture*, 177.

² *Ibid.*, 418; Thirsk, *Agricultural Regions*, 13

³ *Ibid.*, 13

⁴ *The Agricultural Revolution*, 43

⁵ Shiel, R. S., ‘Improving soil productivity in the pre-fertiliser era’ in *Land, Labour & Livestock*, ed Campbell, B. M. S., & Overton, M. Manchester, (1991), 51

⁶ Shiel 52; Newman, E. I., ‘Medieval sheep-corn farming: how much grain yield could each sheep support?’ *Agric Hist Review*, 50 II, (2002), 165

a limited number of changes that the farmer could make to improve output. A significant one was manuring – particularly for the nitrogen which crops use more of than any other nutrient and the declining level of which will, unless replenished, limit the growth of an arable crop after only a few years.⁷ A further benefit occurs from the animals treading-in of the faeces and urine. An effect that is similar to but less effective than ploughing in of manure, for urine and faeces left on the surface will lose their ‘value’ due to rainfall leaching out significant amounts of nutrients such as nitrogen and potassium and the loss of volatile nitrogen from dung.⁸ The loss through leaching was worse on the free draining soils commonly associated with sheep-corn husbandry. The treading in by the fold will also have helped to improve the soil structure of the light soils.⁹

Folding at night is often said to be of greater benefit than the same activity carried out by day as this is when most excretion occurs, and Kerridge claims that the old Wiltshire sheep possessed “the propensity to drop only at night when folded on the arable”.¹⁰ Newman, however, suggests that there is overall little difference between the two. Sheep do defecate at night, but measurements made in a number of locations demonstrated that over the period of 24 hours there was little variation in the production rate of faeces and urine; and that “the rate of excreta production during darkness can vary from being about equal to the rate in daylight, down to about half as fast”.¹¹ Thomas Sclater, who owned the foldcourse at Titchwell (Norfolk) c.1670, would have agreed with Kerridge, reckoning that after Michaelmas the tathing was better and that “one night as good as two when the nights are longer and the feed is better”.¹² It is a moot point, however, whether this benefit arose from the length of time that the sheep were in the fold - a night being longer in October than June. Folding at night, whilst perhaps having no greater benefit for the ground on which the sheep were folded does help to protect them over night as they are penned and not wandering the pastures. Folding at night is also more effective in releasing the labour employed to tasks that require daylight.

⁷ Shiel 53

⁸ Ault, 17, Shiel, 59

⁹ Campbell, *Agricultural Progress*, 35; Kerridge, E., ‘The Sheepfold in Wiltshire and the Floating of the Watermeadows’, *Economic History Review*, 6,3 (1954), 285

¹⁰ Shiel, 56; Kerridge, *Sheepfold in Wiltshire*, 283

¹¹ Newman, 169, 170

¹² NRO MC 1256/1, 808x8, 105

2.1 The Components of Sheep-Corn Husbandry

There are three components to sheep-corn husbandry: the folding of the sheep on the arable; the feeding of the flocks on the post-harvest shack or pastures and heaths; and the rotation or cycling of the flock between these elements. The role of the sheep was multi-functional, the animals being “used as four-footed muck spreaders, or, rather as mobile combinations of fertilizer manufacturers, distributors and spreaders, fetching their own materials and processing them, and delivering and applying their products”.¹³ They were, however, more than just muck spreaders. The nature of the pastures on which they commonly fed – heather for example - would probably not be suited to other ruminants. Sheep, given their dental anatomy, can also close crop the grass and deal more easily with the grasses that typically cover areas such as the downs - cows for example have no upper incisors¹⁴ - and it was for this reason that it was also common to prevent sheep feeding on the arable stubble until after the great beasts had pastured it.¹⁵ Markham, writing in the early seventeenth century, had a slightly different view: “you must by all meanes be sure that they have full bite, [*i.e.*] length of grasse; or cattell, whose tongues are the principall gatherers up of their feede, neither can nor will bite neere unto the ground”.¹⁶

2.2 Close Folding

Kerridge describes the fold as “set large” with 600 hundred or more sheep, with each animal occupying less than two square yards, and that a thousand sheep could fold an acre in one night. The size of the fold would have been related to the size of the field being manured, with one night being allowed for each acre that was to be sown.¹⁷ Folding ‘large’ would also need a significant number of hurdles - a square acre would have a boundary of 268 yards, if a hurdle is six feet long, the shepherd would need 134 hurdles to fold the flock. Dyer, meanwhile, suggests that the density of sheep in a sheepcote was one per square yard.¹⁸

¹³ Kerridge, E., *The Farmers of Old England*, London, (1973), 20

¹⁴ Ault, 46

¹⁵ Ault, 47

¹⁶ Markham, G., *The English Husbandman*, London, (1613); facsimile edition, London, (1982), 89

¹⁷ Kerridge, *Sheepfold*, 285

¹⁸ Dyer, C., ‘Sheepcotes: Evidence for Medieval Sheep Farming’, *Medieval Archaeology*, 39 (1995), 151

The fold above was defined by the number of sheep, but Gimingham on the north-east coast of Norfolk provides some relatively early examples of defining a fold by the number of hurdles; thus in 1493 one tenant had a fold of 24 hurdles, and a second one of 48 hurdles for 100 sheep.¹⁹ The shape and size – by both numbers of hurdles and sheep – of the fold were set out in leases from the Lestrange estate in west Norfolk. At Barrett Ringstead in 1668 the lessee was to fold 700 sheep with 96 hurdles set in a square.²⁰ Similarly a 1694 lease for the North foldcourse at Sedgeford required the tathing of as much of the breck as could be compassed before Michaelmas with 500 sheep in a square fold of six dozen hurdles in a square fold.²¹ The fold of the tenant of East Hall, Sedgeford c.1690 was to consist of 700 head and “8 dozen hurdles and not above ten,” the sheep to lie two nights in a fold, presumably before the fold was moved on to the next patch.²²

The documents thus provide some general sense of the density or how closely packed the flock was and the area which was folded each night. The answers, though, depend upon the length of a hurdle. I contacted a number of possible sources for information on the length, Norfolk Museum Service (Gressenhall) has three in its catalogue but they cannot be located. The catalogue of the Museum of Rural Life at Reading includes drawings of hurdles but they are made of wrought iron and wheeled. Julian Bell, curator at the Weald and Downland Museum, said that he makes hurdles “to the standard pattern which is 6 feet long and 4½ feet high”.²³ Using this length for eight dozen hurdles in a square gives an area of 2304 square yards and for a flock of 700 in this area each sheep would have a ‘space’ of 3.3 square yards. Given the close packing implied in many descriptions and the few illustrations this actually sounds quite generous. On the Lestrange estate the fold is tathing half an acre a night with 700 which is broadly in line with Kerridge’s estimates above.

In Wiltshire the seventeenth-century management of the fold was by common agreement with everyone’s lands being folded. The tenants at All Cannings had three acres folded for every forty sheep they had; at Kingsworthy, each yardland was to have two nights, if wheat was to be sown, with the residue upon corn. Arrangements to ensure equality included ensuring that the flock entered the field at opposite ends alternately to counteract the irregular dispersal of

¹⁹ Hoare, C. M., *The History of an East Anglian Soke*, Bedford, (1918), 217, 221,231

²⁰ NRO LEST/FH 2

²¹ NRO LEST/KA 14 19, 51, 54

²² NRO LEST/KA 12

²³ Bell, J., www.wealddown.co.uk 3/2015

parcels of land.²⁴ Fox suggests that Kerridge's description of the "highly developed" methods of folding in the seventeenth century are "not representative of general practice in medieval England", depending as they did on the extensive pasture of the downland.²⁵ Access to extensive pasture is, however, to a significant extent a characteristic of all sheep-corn husbandry. In addition, he thinks that the system of close folding on the arable "is often assumed to be a widespread norm" in medieval England but may not be so. He acknowledges it as common in East Anglia and recorded in medieval customals for Wiltshire but perhaps rare in Midland England and that folding throughout the year was restricted to those areas which had extensive pastures that allowed large flocks to be established.²⁶

2.3 The Operation of the Fold

The evidence for the mechanics of how and when folding took place is somewhat contradictory. Kerridge has described folding in the Chalk country and the South Downs area of Sussex as "almost unremitting" throughout the year.²⁷ Bowie, however, rejects the idea that folding was a year round activity and says that it was impractical between October and the end of April.²⁸ This is a view Kerridge has elsewhere agreed with - describing folding as a function of spring and summer, with, on light, dry soils that were ploughed in early spring being folded from then until November; whilst on heavier soils the 'season' was restricted to four or even three months.²⁹ He goes on to write that given that most of the benefit would be lost if the land was not ploughed soon after and with folding confined to summer, it could only be carried out on land that was to be winter sown.

In the East Anglian Breckland, in the medieval period, folding was principally from February until the end of July. This was, presumably, firstly on the land that was to be spring sown and then on the fallow, the latter being restricted from the end of the shack period (also commonly February) to the foldcourse.³⁰ The early agricultural writers also suggest summer as the principal time of folding – Fitzherbert says one should "set out the sheepfold in May" again,

²⁴ Kerridge, *Common Fields*, 75,76

²⁵ Fox, H.S.A., 'Some Ecological Dimensions of Medieval Field Systems' in *Archaeological Approaches to Medieval Europe*, ed Biddick, K., Kalamazoo, (1984), 132

²⁶ Fox, *Ecological Dimensions*, 132,133

²⁷ Kerridge, *Agricultural Revolution*, 52, 45

²⁸ Bowie, G., 'Walking and working sheep on the south central chalk uplands in the late medieval and early modern periods', *Rural History Today*, 26, (2014), 3

²⁹ Kerridge, *Common Fields*, 78

³⁰ Bailey, *Marginal Economy*, 77,78

presumably on the fallow.³¹ Thomas Sclater at Titchwell c.1670 suggested a variety of times when folding might begin: after shearing; after mid-summer; or before Michaelmas; and lasting until “St Andrews tide (30th November)...till about 2 or 3 weeks before Christmas, when the nights are cold and the sheep must bee putt into infieldes or enclosures”.³² Edward Lisle, who farmed at Crux Easton in Hampshire and in Wiltshire and the Isle of Wight, compiled, in the first decade of the eighteenth century, a number of observations about the benefits and timing of folding from his own experience and those of other farmers and shepherds who he consulted.³³ In general, a winter fold was not thought to be as good as a summer one because of the frosts and the grass being “less sweet”; whilst one farmer observed that the benefit of an acre folded for barley after lambing was three times that of one winter folded, though Lisle’s shepherd thought ewes ought not to be folded during lambing and on Lisle’s farm a wether flock was folded for barley from the end of February to mid-April.³⁴ Sclater would have agreed - reckoning that wethers tathed better than ewes and that folding “would hurt the ewes for their milk and also the lambes to be shutt up in hurdles...when they must have best feed”.³⁵ Bowie also describes wethers as “the mainstay of the folding system” being hardy and able to survive on little feed, and like Sclater, points out that breeding ewes had “a time-limited role” in the system.³⁶

Folding for wheat before the onset of winter appears to have been common, and Lisle describes a Wiltshire shepherd preparing a fold on new sown wheat at the end of October.³⁷ At Maddington near Salisbury one of Lisle’s informants described folding on the sown wheat until the middle of October, then moving the fold to the sheep leases for a month and then the barley fallows.³⁸ Norden, writing of the “places champion”, thought it “good husbandry to drive a flock of sheep over a [sown field] especially if the ground be light and dry” in order “to settle the earth about the corne”. The result would be that the soil was moist and warm and the crop would be more firmly rooted.³⁹ Stapledon and Davies also wrote that newly sown seed required consolidated ground. This could be achieved by grazing animals over the ground and that sheep

³¹ Fitzherbert, J., *Booke of Husbandrie*, London (1598); facsimile edition, Amsterdam (1979), 29

³² NRO MC 156/1, 808x8, 105

³³ Fussell, G. E., *The Old English Farming Books, 1523-1730*, London, (1947), 94

³⁴ Lisle, E., *Observations in Husbandry II*, London, (1757), facsimile edition, Farnborough, (1970), 154, 180, 190

³⁵ NRO MC 1256/1, 808x8, 106

³⁶ Bowie, 3

³⁷ Lisle, 182, 181

³⁸ Lisle, 187

³⁹ Norden, J., *Surveyors Dialogue*, London (1618), Facsimile edition, (Amsterdam), (1979), 229

were best for this because of their “more even treading over the surface”.⁴⁰ In north Wiltshire, however, the wheat was not folded after sowing because the high ridges left the sheep stranded in the furrows, whilst others did fold on the fallows through the winter, provided that it was not too wet.⁴¹

The timing of folding was important. If it occurred too early for spring sown crops the manure “would be washed away” by spring, and Lisle records how his shepherd commented that his ewes were late lambing because they had been folded on the sown wheat too late in the year.⁴² One is left with the impression of a considerable variety of practices, particularly in terms of winter folding, dependent on local circumstances and thus Lisle described how a winter fold on clay and cold hill country does little good, but where the land is light and dry it “does great service to the barley crop”.⁴³ Overall, it appears that the fold principally operated in the spring, summer and autumn, whilst winter folding was restricted to those areas where drier or less cold conditions made it possible and even here the fold was withdrawn when the conditions were not right.

Finally, the flocks were moved regularly - Kerridge reckoned the sheep of Wiltshire and Hampshire were bred for walking – from down to field and back again, covering from four to six miles a day.⁴⁴ Lisle records one of his early eighteenth-century informants taking a similar view: sheep that lived in inclosures were “not used to shift for their living” and would starve on bare commons; a flock, where there was intercommoning “must be accustomed to the place”.⁴⁵

⁴⁰ Stapledon, G. R., Davies, W., *Ley Farming*, London, (1948); journeytoforever.org/farm_library/ley/ley14.html 1/2014

⁴¹ Lisle, 187, 188

⁴² Lisle, 182, 164

⁴³ Lisle, 183

⁴⁴ Kerridge., *Agricultural Revolution*, 43; Kerridge, *Sheepfold*, 283

⁴⁵ Lisle, 153

2.4 Fallows and Pasture

The post-harvest medieval field provided a significant amount of materials for animals to graze on – crop stubble, weeds, grass, and the grass and other vegetation on headlands and hedges (if there were any⁴⁶) – enough to support the township’s flocks and other animals. Such a resource was not however unlimited and stints were common. Ault suggests the numbers of sheep involved as between one and two per acre of arable, whilst for the Wiltshire flocks of St Swithun’s Priory, c.1300, it was “about two per acre of fallow”.⁴⁷ A more definitive figure comes from Podimore in Somerset from the early fourteenth century where an acre of fallow would support two sheep during the summer months, and similarly, c. 1240 on the Countess of Lincoln’s estate, where the acre would support at least two sheep for a year.⁴⁸

Feeding the sheep on the fallow was in essence re-cycling the tathe *in situ*; whilst grazing them on the pastures was ‘robbing Peter to pay Paul’; for sheep-corn husbandry is predicated on the transfer of nutrients from the pastures to the arable.⁴⁹ The conundrum implicit in this transfer is that the fold, by preventing the loss of fertility of the arable and attempting to maximise the output of grain, risks degrading the pastures due to overstocking. This was a realistic concern and there has been a long and inconclusive debate about the impact of soil exhaustion on grain yield. There is, however, firm evidence based on the decline in carcase weights of all large domestic animals, between the Anglo-Saxon period and the fourteenth century, for the degeneration of livestock consequent on the loss of pasturage.⁵⁰ The net result of such ‘degradation’ would also have been less nutrient transfer.

The foregoing is predicated on the importance of grain in the economy, and to the extent to which this was a problem in those areas which practised sheep-corn husbandry is questionable. In theory the ‘extensive’ pastures available on downs and heaths was sufficient to prevent the degradation of such lands – as Fox recognised (see above) – and in Breckland there were “ample reserves of summer pasture.”⁵¹ The pastures were of course ‘refreshed’ by the flock during the day, during the folding season and whilst they were used as summer pasture; but the random scatter of the tathe was much less efficient than the fold.

⁴⁶ Fox, *Ecological Dimensions*, 128

⁴⁷ Ault, 48; Harrison, B., ‘Field Systems and Demesne Farming on the Wiltshire Estates of St Swithun’s Priory Winchester, 1248-1340’, *Agric Hist Review*, 43,1, (1995), 6

⁴⁸ Fox, *Ecological Dimensions*, 126,128

⁴⁹ Campbell, *English Seigniorial Agriculture*, 193

⁵⁰ Campbell, *English Seigniorial Agriculture*, 17

⁵¹ Bailey, *Marginal Economy*, 62

The stinting of animal numbers was a means of controlling the risks of over-grazing and was applied to tenants if not manorial lords. On some but not all of the manors of St Swithun's Priory, c.1300, the customary tenants were allowed 30 or 32 sheep per virgate, they could, however, also pay rent to keep more sheep – which somewhat defeats the object but was no doubt good for revenue in the short term.⁵² At Wylde in 1633, the sheep commons stint was 40 per yardland.⁵³ Such numbers may, however, have been irrelevant compared to those of the major estates, but the flock size was governed, in the end, by how many could be overwintered.⁵⁴ To what extent overstocking did occur is not known, but there must always have been pressure to increase the size of the fold on the basis that an improved yield of grain is a more measurable output than the longer term impact on the pastures.

2. 5 Alternatives to the Fold

Given the difficulties of folding in winter, the flocks may have been left to graze freely on the fallows, as is recorded at Podimore.⁵⁵ In some areas, however, it is clear that the sheep were 'housed' in sheepcotes; where they were kept at night and in bad weather and grazed on the upland pastures by day.⁵⁶ This practice stretched from Martinmas (11th November) until Easter according to Walter of Henley.⁵⁷ Sheepcotes were principally found in upland areas: being recorded on 45 Cotswolds manors; approximately 60 on the episcopal estates of Winchester, and other ecclesiastical and lay estates in Wiltshire and Hampshire.⁵⁸ They were also common in medieval Breckland, Bury Abbey built a new one at Fornham St Martin in the fourteenth century, and held others at Timworth, Fornham All Saints and St Genevieve; similarly a new sheepcote was constructed at Lakenheath in 1394/5.⁵⁹ There was also one on the north-east Norfolk coast at Gimingham where, in 1391, the costs of plastering *le sheepcote* are recorded.⁶⁰ In addition there are a number of references to sheephouses in East Anglia based on the nomenclature used in field books. At Cockley Cley in the last quarter of the sixteenth century there was a furlong called sheephouse whartland which lay next to the common pasture, whilst

⁵² Harrison, B., 6

⁵³ Kerridge, Common Fields, 75

⁵⁴ Kerridge, Sheepfolds, 286

⁵⁵ Fox, Ecological Dimensions, 126

⁵⁶ Dyer, Sheepcotes, 136, 151

⁵⁷ Ibid, 136

⁵⁸ Dyer, Sheepcotes, 137, 151; Hare, J., 'Agricultural and Rural Settlement in the Chalklands of Wiltshire and Hampshire' in *The Medieval Landscape of Wessex*, ed Aston M, Lewis, C, Oxford (1994), 161

⁵⁹ Bailey, Marginal Economy 90, 251

⁶⁰ Hoare, 144

at Ringstead, c. 1550, there is a reference to a “broken shephouse” with five roods.⁶¹ This is also marked on the 1625 map of Ringstead, a “broken shephouse” which lay on the edge of the Sheep’s ling.⁶² The term ‘shephouse croft’ also appears as the name of a furlong at Bircham c.1340, Holkham – again at the boundary of ‘le lyngs’, and fourteenth-century Walsham le Willows.⁶³ The Ringstead example was clearly dilapidated and no longer used and I have found no later references to such structures; suggestive perhaps that they went out of use in the sixteenth century. Any East Anglian examples are also likely to have been built of wood and thatch and much less likely to survive as archaeological evidence.

The Elizabethan agricultural writer Fitzherbert was not, it seems, a fan of the fold for, after the oft quoted advice not to let the sheep out of the fold in the morning but to “rayse them up and let them stand still a good season, that they may dung and pisse”, he goes on to say that “folding of sheep maketh them scabbed and breedeth mathes [maggots or grubs⁶⁴] and that leaving them in the fold in bad weather “abateth them much of their flesh”. His advice to the man who had his own field was to drive twenty, thirty, forty stakes in his fallow ground, as required by the number of sheep, then bring the sheep to the stakes and “you shall see the sheep rub themselves thereon, and let the shepherd goe about them till they be set: and thus learne them two or three nights, and they will follow the stakes as he shifteth them, and sit by them”. The benefits of this method, as Fitzherbert saw it, was that the sheep would not get scabs or be diminished of their flesh; could seek shelter from a hedge in foul weather; it was “a great safeguard...from rotting” and a saving on the cost of hurdles and fleakes.⁶⁵ This advice, whilst aimed at the man with his own field, is relevant to the open field in regions with common grazing; and Fox suggests that such extensive grazing was employed in the Midlands.⁶⁶

A sheep fold was not, of course, the only means of restoring arable fertility. The most common alternative was farmyard manure, which could be carted out to the fields, similarly the sheepcotes discussed above were a further source of manure.⁶⁷ In a similar fashion, manure was collected from sheep pens in the Broadlands.⁶⁸ All of these sources, however, shared a

⁶¹ NRO MC 830/1, 797x1, 112; NRO LEST/EH 2

⁶² NRO LEST/OD

⁶³ Campbell, *English Seigniorial Agriculture*, 269; Hassell, *Beauroy*, 535; Lock, *Walsham- le-Willows I*, index, 362

⁶⁴ OED Online

⁶⁵ Fitzherbert, 29,30

⁶⁶ Fox, *Ecological Dimensions*, 131

⁶⁷ Kerridge, *Common Fields*, 26; Dyer, *Sheepcotes*, 151.

⁶⁸ Campbell, *Agricultural Progress*, 34.

common drawback: the manure had to be moved from its source to the field, which is reasonable if it is adjacent or nearby, but less so if each load has to travel several miles - miles that the flock would walk for you. In addition, labour has to be expended to mix and spread the manure and if individual holdings were intermingled, there could be problems of access. All kinds of other sources were also employed to try and improve fertility of the soil: for example, fish, sea sand, pond muck, soot and night soil from towns; and whilst Kerridge suggests that the last was not employed until the later eighteenth century, Campbell documents its use in some villis close to Norwich in the late thirteenth century.⁶⁹ It is probable that many of these were more creative than effective.

2.6 Where Sheep May Safely Graze

Sheep suffered a number of diseases which, in the medieval period, went under the umbrella term of 'murrain', two of which - foot rot and liver fluke - are associated with wet ground.⁷⁰ Why then were saltmarshes "the best grazing anywhere for sheep fattening" or as Fitzherbert points out sheep may go on salt marshes but not "all marrish and marsh grounds".⁷¹ Salt marshes have been described as immune from foot rot and liver fluke, and salt, even at the comparatively low level present in sea water, clearly inhibits the survival and growth of the bacteria which cause foot rot and the fresh water mollusc that is part of the life cycle of the liver fluke.⁷² Current advice says that sheep should not be grazed where dung has been spread as the bacteria that cause foot rot thrive in the digestive tract and are thus excreted in the dung;⁷³ which suggests that the practice of close folding could in effect provide a permanent reservoir for the re-infection of the flock.

⁶⁹ Kerridge, *Agricultural Revolution*, 241; Campbell, 'Agricultural Progress', 34.

⁷⁰ Trow-Smith, R., *A History of British Livestock Husbandry to 1700*, London, (1957), 155

⁷¹ Thirsk, J., *English Peasant Farming*, London, (1957), 85; Fitzherbert, 56

⁷² Applebaum, S., 'Roman Britain' in *Agrarian History of England and Wales, I,II*, ed Finberg, H. P. R., Cambridge, (1972), 68; Wikipedia, *Fasciola hepatica*

⁷³ www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/sci/lifesci/research/welfare/footrotinsheep/fieldmanagement 2010

3. THE REGIONAL DISTRIBUTION OF SHEEP-CORN HUSBANDRY

The database used to map the distribution of the foldcourse discussed in Chapter 2 demonstrated a strong bias towards East Anglia. The remainder of the country was not, of course, free of folds, and sheep-corn husbandry played a significant role in the farming landscape in many parts of lowland England. Kerridge claiming it was the most widespread type of husbandry in lowland England.⁷⁴ However, attempts to map the farming regions of early modern England would suggest that whilst it was widespread it did not dominate – geographically at least.

Thirsk produced what she described as “a very tentative map” of farming regions, including those characterised by sheep-corn husbandry, for the period 1500-1640, and this distribution can, for sheep-corn husbandry at least, be extended back into the medieval period.⁷⁵ I have adapted her map to highlight those regions classified by her as “sheep and corn on downland wold and breckland” (Fig 2.1). This description could be extended to include heaths given that the Norfolk heathlands and Suffolk Sandlings are included in her map and the classification that lies behind this map is based on soil types and topography.⁷⁶

3.1 Landscapes of Sheep-corn Husbandry

There are, as Fig 2.1 indicates, three broad types of landscape associated with sheep-corn husbandry: the wolds, heathlands and downlands. The following section includes a brief discussion of the first two and is followed by a more detailed examination of the downlands of Wiltshire.

⁷⁴ Kerridge, E., *The Sheepfold in Wiltshire*, 282.

⁷⁵ Thirsk, *Agricultural Regions*, 28.

⁷⁶ Overton, M., *Agricultural Revolution in England*, Cambridge, (1996), 47

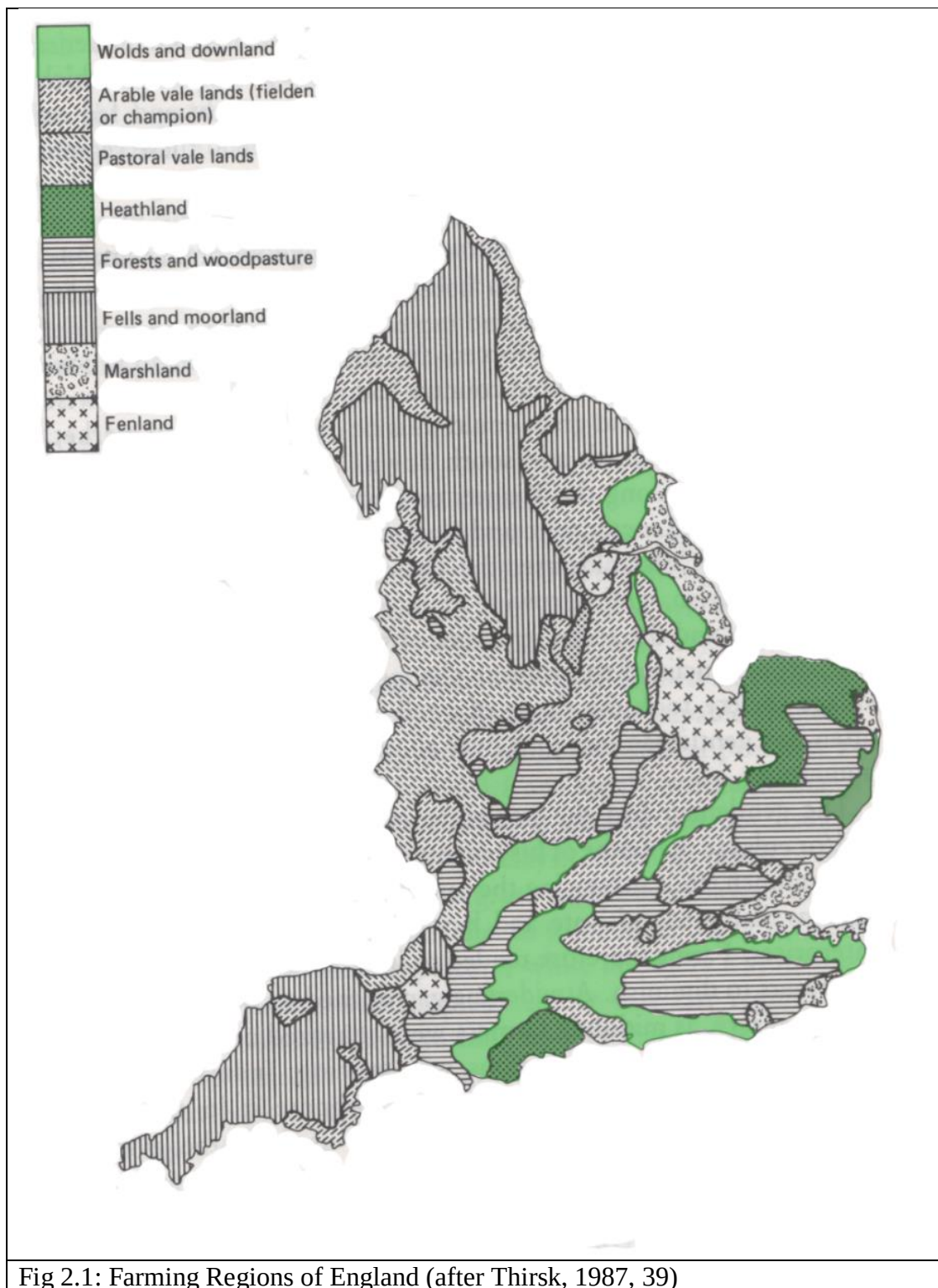


Fig 2.1: Farming Regions of England (after Thirsk, 1987, 39)

Wolds and Heathlands

The term ‘wold’ comes from *wald* meaning wood but may well have been applied to regions of “relatively lightly spread woodland”, akin, in the seventh and eighth centuries and later, to wood pasture.⁷⁷ Elsewhere, Fox has characterised the early Wolds as “park like” with open areas of pasture, which were initially zones of seasonal grazing for vale settlements, and only perhaps settled in the ninth to eleventh centuries.⁷⁸ The wolds are, geologically and in their soils a diverse group – the Lincolnshire wolds are chalky whilst the Cotswolds are oolitic limestone, which in Lincolnshire underlies the heath.⁷⁹ Fox also identifies a number of areas of wold in the east Midlands such as Bromswold on the south-east of the Nene valley and the Leicestershire wolds both of which are areas of slowly permeable calcareous and clay soils.⁸⁰

Heathlands are commonly formed in areas of poor, acidic and often sandy soils, and often carry the names of vanished woodlands.⁸¹ Heaths are the result of human activities such as the reduction of the woodland and agricultural exploitation, which both led to the loss of soil quality and the subsequent use of such lands for pastures and probably therefore to further depletion.⁸² Tubbs illustrates this succession as follows:

woodland > hazel/grassland/grass heath > heather.⁸³

A succession that might also be seen in functional terms as: woodland > wood pasture > heath.

Such a succession would indicate that at any given time areas of ‘heathland’ might contain zones with some or all of these functions. With regard to Norfolk and heathland restoration, Barnes *et al* have queried what the “real character” of the heaths was and the degree to which it “varied from place to place.”⁸⁴ Also, the various views on the role(s) of the landscape of the New Forest further illustrate the succession - Rackham refers to it as heathland; Bond characterises it as having a wood pasture regime in the medieval period; whilst Tubbs suggests

⁷⁷ Fox, H., ‘The Wolds Before c.1500’ in *The English Rural Landscape*, ed Thirsk, J., Oxford, (2000), 51

⁷⁸ Fox, H., ‘The People of the Wolds in English Settlement History’ in *The Rural Settlement of Medieval England* eds Aston, M., Austin, D., Dyer, C., Oxford, (1989), 83,84, 86, 87, 94

⁷⁹ Robinson, D., ‘Natural Regions’, in *An Historical Atlas of Lincolnshire*, ed Bennett, S. & Bennett, N., Chichester, (2001), 8

⁸⁰ Fox, People of the Wolds, 80, fig 5.1; Soils of Eastern England, 1: 250,000 map

⁸¹ Webb, 21; Rackham, 291

⁸² Tubbs, C. R., *The New Forest: An Ecological History*, Newton Abbot, (1968), 63

⁸³ Tubbs, 60

⁸⁴ Dallas, P., Whyte, N., Williamson, T., Barnes, G., ‘Heathland and Wood Pasture in Norfolk: ecology and landscape history’ *British Wildlife*, 18[6], (2007), 395

that, when it first became a royal forest in the late eleventh century, it probably had more woodland.⁸⁵ Heathlands occur in a number of locations in lowland England, including Dorset, Hampshire, Sussex, Berkshire, Lincolnshire and East Anglia, but only in the last two is there, apparently, a significant relationship between heathland and sheep-corn husbandry.⁸⁶

Downlands

The downlands extend across southern England. Salisbury plain is the largest area of unbroken downland in England from which the chalklands stretch into Dorset, Hampshire and Berkshire and the North and South Downs; all of which is, geologically, one coherent area with the underlying chalk providing “a unity to the topography and human activity”.⁸⁷ It was, in the immediate post-glacial period, wooded but the woods were steadily cleared for farming, and by the Roman period the Downlands were employed extensively for arable farming.⁸⁸ Subsequently, arable farming and settlements developed in the valleys which dissect the region and the characteristic division of the country into the long narrow territories (subsequently parishes) of meadow, arable and downland occurred.⁸⁹

It is perhaps in this shift of settlement to the valleys and the abandonment of arable farming on the Downs that the genesis of a ‘mature’ sheep-corn husbandry lies. The changes creating as they did the need for the flock to rotate between field and downland pasture; and - rather than this happening on the basis of a seasonal transhumance – the flock’s movement became a regular, if not a daily event. A development perhaps supported by the strong manorial authority and large estates of the area.⁹⁰

⁸⁵ Rackham, 294; Bond, J., ‘Forests, Chases, Warrens and Parks in Medieval Wessex’, in *The Medieval Landscape of Wessex*, eds. Aston M and Lewis C., Oxford, (1994), 131; Tubbs, 63

⁸⁶ Webb, 60-74

⁸⁷ Bettey, J., ‘Downlands’ in *The English Rural Landscape*, ed Thirsk, J., Oxford, (2000), 27

⁸⁸ *Ibid*, 31, 33

⁸⁹ *Ibid*, 36, 35

⁹⁰ *Ibid*, 30

4 SHEEP CORN HUSBANDRY IN WILTSHIRE

The following is an exploration of how the sheep fold was incorporated into the farming regimes and the ways in which manorial control was exercised in the sheep corn areas of the chalk country of Wiltshire. The soils of which are, not surprisingly, dominated by chalk; with shallow, well-drained, silty and calcareous soils over chalk on the valley slopes (Upton 1 (342a) and Icknield (341) associations) and those of the Andover 1 and 2 associations (343h, i) predominantly on the plateaux. The soils of the valley bottoms (Frome, 812a) are shallow chalky and non-chalky loams over flint gravel and liable to flood (Figs 4.1,2,3).⁹¹

In the chalk country common fields and folds were inseparable and, Kerridge thinks, inevitable because the flocks of individual tenants, with pasture for small numbers of sheep, were “worthless” when it came to restoring fertility and only large communal flocks would do; those with “a few hundred” sheep gained far more, in his view, from putting them into the common flock than he lost. He quotes William Marshall to the effect that “such is the power of invention...that even the lowest class of farmers are enabled to keep sheep, and fold their arable lands”.⁹² To what extent Marshall’s humble farmer is the same as Kerridge’s man with a few hundred sheep is, however, questionable.

The chalklands of Wessex certainly supported very large flocks. The Bishop of Winchester had, in 1211, over 2000 sheep at Knoyle and 1200 at Downton, while Hyde Abbey, Winchester, had nearly 5000 sheep on its manors in 1282. The large lay manors also had significant numbers of sheep in their flocks and on these large estates, both lay and ecclesiastical, the flocks were organised in a highly centralised fashion.⁹³ This is given greater weight by the fact that even some farmers with sizeable flocks of their own put “some or all” of them into the communal flock; for example, at Amesbury Earls, where in 1587 the demesne farmer’s hog flock, the town flock and that of one of the freeholders were merged for folding.⁹⁴

⁹¹ Findlay, G. J. N., Colborne, D. W., Cope, T. R., Harrod, D. V., Staines, S. J., *Soils and their Use in South West England*, Harpenden, (1984), 75, 78, 213, 297

⁹² Kerridge, *Common Fields*, 74

⁹³ Hare, 160

⁹⁴ Kerridge, *Common Fields*, 74

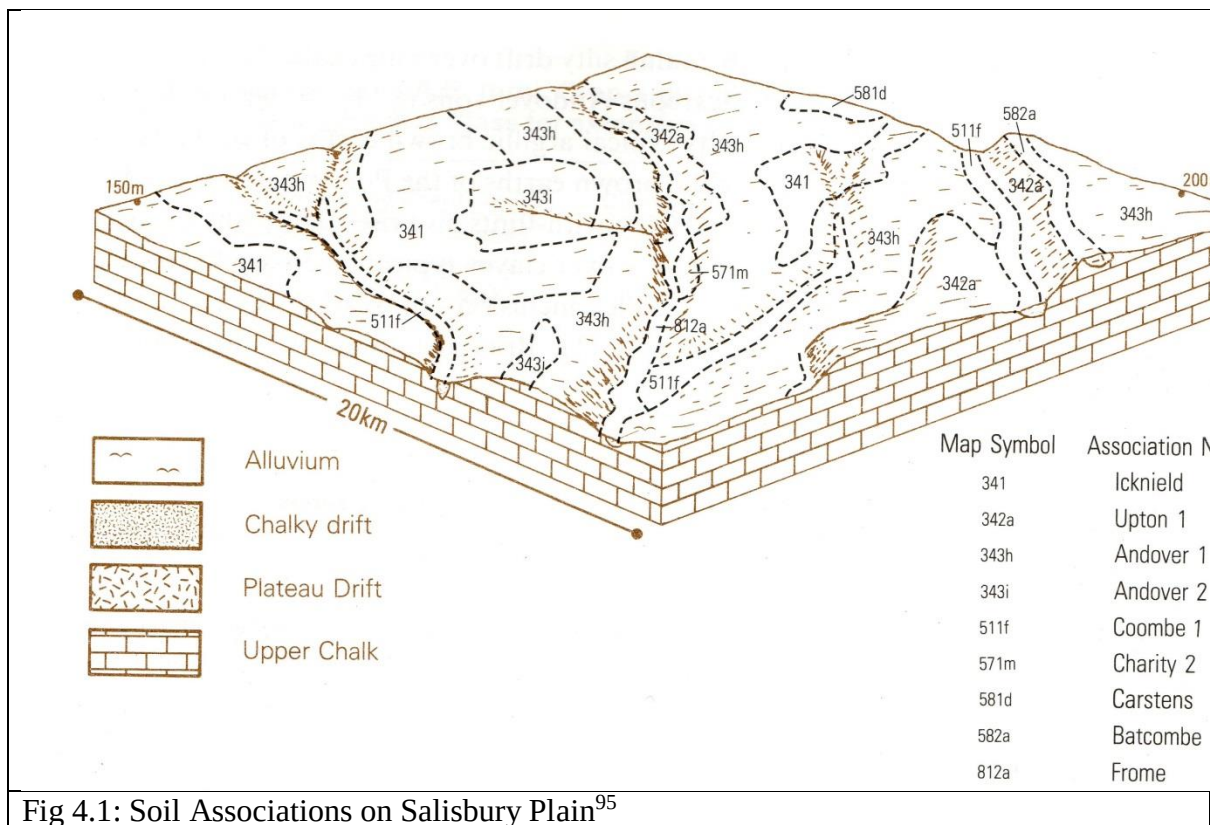


Fig 4.1: Soil Associations on Salisbury Plain⁹⁵



Fig 4.2: Arable field in Wylve Valley near Codford St Mary

⁹⁵ Findlay *et al*, 80



Fig 4.3: The Downs above Wylve

The chalk downlands of Wiltshire were, in the early modern period, dominated by great estates and major landowners with manorial courts exerting strong control over the tenants and this can be seen, with regard to the fold, in a number of examples.⁹⁶ At Heale, the court of 1609 ordered that no tenant or commoner of the manor shall keep any sheep upon any part of the common downs or fields but in the common fold, in the keeping of the common shepherd, “accordinge to an anciente ordinaunce”.⁹⁷ The same controls were exercised in other manors: for example at Brigmerston in 1608 whose tenants were also required to provide feed for the flock in winter; thus in 1610 it was ordered that every tenant bring 30lb of “good sweete merchantable haye” for every 100 sheep he had, to the down by St James’ Day (25th July) on pain of 3s 4d in default thereof.⁹⁸ In addition to hay, tenants were also required to supply hurdles for the folding – ten for each yardland held at Kingsworthy.⁹⁹ However, those who did not keep sheep could, upon payment receive the benefits of the fold on their land.¹⁰⁰ Kerridge characterises these arrangements as the tenantry arranging their folds to their common

⁹⁶ Betty J, ed. *Wiltshire Farming in the Seventeenth Century*, Wiltshire Record Society, vol. 57 (2005) xii

⁹⁷ *Ibid*, 173

⁹⁸ *Ibid*, 179

⁹⁹ Kerridge, *Common Fields*, 75

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid*, 75

advantage, “taking all necessary steps to integrate them with their cultivations”.¹⁰¹ But not all the tenants appear to have been happy with the arrangements. At Compton Chamberlayne in 1652, where no tenant “shall keep any sheep in the droves but such as go with the flock”; Richard Oake was presented for keeping his sheep in the droves and he was subsequently presented for taking his sheep from the hayward who was driving them to the pound and then removing his sheep from the pound.¹⁰² Such courts also controlled the freeholders – for at Heale in 1607 John Harforde, freeholder, was ordered to provide nine hurdles to the common shepherd or be fined 3s 4d and lose the benefit of the fold.¹⁰³ The picture that the foregoing presents reinforces Betty’s comments as to the strength of manorial control and emphasise the community’s control and use of the fold. The individual fold appears to be unusual, if not non-existent, though the example of Amesbury Earls above indicates there may well have been other flocks in the parish.

These examples are from the early modern period and communal folding in the region persisted into the eighteenth century, as Marshall’s remarks above indicate.¹⁰⁴ The arrangements in Wiltshire appear to have at least the veneer of support and involvement from the tenants of the manor and in some if not the majority of places they were actively involved. Kerridge’s focus is on the small tenant and the drive for communal management and control – the fold being, in his description, “a communal organisation of small proprietors”.¹⁰⁵ The manorial lord or his lessee, however, appear to be largely absent from this picture; and many of them were absentees.¹⁰⁶ A common flock does not preclude a separate one held by the lord or his farmer – at Brigmerston for example, there was such a farmer, for in 1616 the copyholders and tenants were much wronged for “the farmer of this mannor doe not fodder theire sheepe three days and nights accordinge to the customes”.¹⁰⁷ Kerridge also describes the arrangements outlined above as being “hindered in earlier times by fold-suit” the special faldage rights belonging to some manorial lords.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰¹ Ibid, 76

¹⁰² Betty, *Seventeenth Century Farming*, 189

¹⁰³ Ibid, 173

¹⁰⁴ Kerridge, *Common Fields*, 76

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, 34

¹⁰⁶ Betty, *Seventeenth Century Farming*, 203

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, 180

¹⁰⁸ Kerridge *Common Fields*, 76

4.1 Medieval Sheep-Corn Husbandry in Wiltshire

A number of cartularies and other records, both ecclesiastical and lay, would suggest that in the medieval period whilst there was clearly manorial direction and control over the tenants and their involvement with the fold, the situation was not monolithic and that there was greater diversity than Kerridge suggests, particularly between ecclesiastical and lay estates. On the former both fold suit and villein service were prevalent. The 1324/5 account roll for the Winchester episcopal manor of Downton (Wilts) for example includes in the winter works of the tenants holding one virgate: roofing the ewe house and mending the walls of the same, and cutting wood for new hurdles for the sheepfold.¹⁰⁹ The roll also refers to 10s received for sheep pastured in the field of Witheton and lying in the Lord's fold and 5s 10d for 160 hoggs pastured in another field.¹¹⁰ A more detailed description of medieval sheep corn husbandry comes from the priory of St Swithun's, Winchester which held a number of manors on the chalklands, principally in Wiltshire.¹¹¹ At those manors with the largest demesne flocks (Enford, Overton, Alton Priors and Stockton) most of the tenants had to put their own sheep in the lord's fold (ie his faldage right) and they were, as Harrison expresses it, "allowed access to the lord's pasture in return"; however, only on the manor of Overton were the tenants apparently allowed to have the lord's fold on their own land, and that only for the 14 days between Christmas Eve and Epiphany.¹¹²

At first reading one wonders how the tenants on the manors other than Overton maintained the fertility of their own lands, without the benefit of the fold. On some manors, including Overton and Alton Priors, the number of sheep that those tenants performing customary services were permitted to graze in the lord's fold was 30 or 32 for each virgate and *pro rata* for tenants with half virgates. The tenant flocks were, however, larger than this allowance, for they could, on payment of a herbage or *faldgable* rent to the lord, increase the number; as, for example, at Alton Priors where faldgable was paid for 206 sheep in 1310/11.¹¹³ The author describes the practice of the tenants placing their sheep in the lord's fold as "a popular arrangement" since tenants were prepared to pay for the extra sheep; it is difficult, however, to understand why the tenants at Alton Priors would pay to put more sheep in the fold than they were required to, if

¹⁰⁹ Titow, J. W., *English Rural Society 1200-1350*, London, (1969) 133

¹¹⁰ Ibid, 117

¹¹¹ Harrison, B., 6

¹¹² Ibid, 7

¹¹³ Ibid, 6

the fold did not come on their land.¹¹⁴ By contrast, at Stockton each holder of a virgate was allowed to common with 64 sheep, giving a flock of 1120 in toto - one that was three times larger than the demesne flock. Half of these sheep would have grazed in the lord's fold, but the rest, as the author says, must have grazed on a common exclusive to the tenants and separate from the demesne pastures and also available to fold on the tenants' land.¹¹⁵ Whether the tenants in the other manors had a similar, if unrecorded, asset is not known.

The St Swithun manors were located in villis with no other lords and few freeholders and were thus exclusive to the prior and his tenants and display many of the attributes of such lordly, ecclesiastical control.¹¹⁶ But, what is clear from the above is that despite the manors all being held by the same lord and there being on similar chalky soils, there was a degree of diversity in the arrangements that pertained with regard to the flocks and folding within each manor; and whilst there is no evidence of separate individual folds, one has the impression that some tenants, such as those at Stockton, may have been "better off" than those at Alton Priors.

Turning to lay owners, the first examples illustrate the full range and varying degrees of service and freedoms on the Wessex manors of Adam de Stratton. An extent for the manor of Sevenhampton in 1275 states that the villein tenants holding a messuage and half virgate of land had to wash and shear sheep for two days and lambs for one and, if they had sheep they were to be in the Countess' fold from Hokeday (second Tuesday after Easter) until the feast of St Martin (11th November).¹¹⁷ However, other tenants, of Sevenhampton and Stratton were paying fines to keep their sheep out of the lord's fold, for example in 1273/4: "*de hominibus ville pro cccxx bidentibus ne jacarent in faldia comitis xxiijs vd*".¹¹⁸ Their names are not given in the accounts so it is not possible to confirm their status but the extents do list numbers of free and customary tenants in both villis.¹¹⁹ The entries which cover sixteen accounting years are summarised in Table 2.1. It has been suggested that the variation in numbers is due to disease (murrain) and whilst this is the most likely cause,¹²⁰ I wonder if the variation could also include an element of tenants moving their animals in and out of the flock as discussed

¹¹⁴ Ibid, 7

¹¹⁵ Ibid, 6

¹¹⁶ Ibid, 3

¹¹⁷ Farr, M. W., ed. *Accounts & Surveys of the Wiltshire Lands of Adam de Stratton*, Wiltshire Record Society, vol. 14 (1959), 7

¹¹⁸ Ibid 51

¹¹⁹ Ibid, 6, 25

¹²⁰ Miller, Hatcher, 155

regarding the use of temporary folds at Walsham le Willows in Suffolk (p. 101). Finally, the extent for Upton (Berks) in 1271 states that there were six customary tenants, each holding one virgate, who were permitted to have their own fold. The list of one virgate tenants is followed however by those tenants holding half a virgate or messuages and who were required to wash and shear the lord's sheep.¹²¹

The estates of Adam de Stratton thus display a range of tenancies from the requirement on villeins to put their sheep in the lord's flock and perform customary works; through the right for some to buy out of the lord's fold and run their own (although from the way in which the records are presented, it is probable that a number of individuals grouped together each year to operate their own single flock); to the right, at Upton, for some individuals, upon payment, to have their own fold. Again, it is not clear whether this last group folded their sheep separately or grouped together to share the benefits.

Table 4.1: Payments Made for Keeping Sheep out of the Lord's Fold

YEAR	No. of SHEEP	PAYMENT (s/d)	PAGE
1272/3	542	40s 5d	40
1273/4	340	23s 5d	51
1274/5	253	18s 1d	61
1275/6	233	15s 8d	72
1276/7	250	16s 11d	82
1277/8	340	24s 4d	92
1278/9	354	25s 4d	101
1279/80	254	18s 2d	110
1280/1	273	19s 10d	119
1281/2	237	17s	128
1282/3	353	25s 3d	136
1283/4	247	17s 7d	144
1284/5	325	23s 3d	153
1285/6	348	24s 11d	162
1286/7	361	25s 10d	171
1287/8	409	29s 3d	179

Note: page refers to the page number for the entry.

¹²¹ Farr, 19,20

There is no evidence of any elements of free folding in the Stratton documents unlike a number of the following examples, also from lay charters. The status of the various tenants involved in the transactions that are to be outlined is rarely explicit; however, Hilton describes the witnesses to the charters of the thirteenth century (and presumably other centuries) as being of free status in order to be valid witnesses and Stenton suggested that the freeholder of small estate is...revealed... through his power of disposing of his land by charter.¹²² I have therefore applied these principles to explore the background and status of the various people named in the charters together with the various aspects of the free fold.

The cartulary of the Hungerford family provides a number of examples of the interaction of the lord and tenants, and variations between different villis. The first; undated, but probably early fourteenth century on the basis of the named witnesses, and the dates of other entries for which they were witnesses, is from Rushall and demonstrates the number of folds that there could be in a township. It is a charter for one virgate with pasture for a defined number of animals and 60 sheep in the fold of the freemen of Rushall.¹²³ Rushall also had a number of other folds: the rector had one - a charter of 1301 describes a division of one virgate including 14 sheep in the fold of the rector; an undated charter is for a messuage and croft in Rushall...pasture for 36 sheep in the folds of the parson of the same place and free of herbage and pannage.¹²⁴ A document of 1283 from the same vill refers to a croft with pasture for 40 sheep in Wordenlese with manure of the fold called Wordensfold; and one of 1296 to a fold called flokfold, and in 1329 the chaplain of Rushall was granted a messuage with one virgate and pasture for 80 sheep in 'freshmannesfold'.¹²⁵ In 1389 the parson was granted lands and pasture for 415 sheep in the same fields and hills in a fold called 'wetherfold' continuously folded together, and pasture for 90 sheep lying together in 'wordenfold'.¹²⁶ Thus, there was in Rushall at various times at least five folds: a freemens' fold, freshmannesfold (is this a variant spelling of freemen?); wordensfold; flokfold (the tenants fold?); the parson (or rector's) fold; and a fold for wethers. There is no mention of a demesne fold, alternatively, Rushall was perhaps a vill without a significant demesne estate. The freemen of Rushall were clearly running their own fold but may have been paying herbage; however, the one example from Rushall above that defines the pasture as being free of herbage is a charter of John de Aqua to

¹²² Hilton, *Medieval Society*, 129; quoted in Williamson J...*Peasant Land Market*, 89

¹²³ Kirby, J. L., ed. *The Hungerford Cartulary*, Wiltshire Record Society, vol. 49, (1994), 62

¹²⁴ *Ibid*, 66, 59

¹²⁵ *Ibid*, 64, 65, 66

¹²⁶ *Ibid*, 70

Alice his daughter, and John is of free status: being at various times witness to a charter, granting land, and a juror on inquisition *post mortem*.¹²⁷

Another document from the Hungerford Cartulary is illustrative of folding on a larger scale than most of the examples so far, and indicates, in this particular case, the arrangements that were agreed between a lord and his tenants. The agreement is undated but the two tenants are listed as ‘hidiers’ in the manor of Britford (Wilts) in 1329.¹²⁸ It is between the lord of the manor and Robert Geberd and William Duyn who are both free men given that they were, on a number of occasions, witnesses to charters, in one example of which the phrase “have set their seals” is employed and Gebberd is also recorded as granting land in 1341.¹²⁹ The agreement states that: “the entire hide of Robert and William which is not of the lord’s demesne to have 300 sheep in its fold, the pasture called ‘Friddoune’ to be several from Hokeday (second Tuesday after Easter) to Michaelmas (29th September) saving to the lord pasture for 80 lambs from Hokeday to Midsummer (24th June), the meadow called ‘Westmede’ to be several from Candlemas (2nd February) to the 1st August, Northmede to be several from Candlemas to the 29th August, Rihull to be several from 1st August to 29th August, Le Holrich to be several from Candlemas to midsummer, the pasture called Le Fern to be common the whole year, pasture called Le More and Le MerSSH to be commons the whole year but not for sheep except the days of their washing and all the sheep of the village to go into the Le Friddoune on 30th November to feed until Hokeday”.¹³⁰ In terms of folding the significant element is that the two named tenants have their own defined pasture (Friddoune, presumably downland), from April to Michaelmas, to feed their flock over the summer and fold it on their fallow arable at night. The down reverted to common for all tenants with rights from November until the spring and Geberd and Duyn could after feeding their flock on the stubble after harvest through October, presumably put their sheep in the common flock. The fact that these tenants land is being defined as not part of the demesne would indicate that there was a demesne flock and, in addition, given the winter arrangements a common flock.

¹²⁷ Ibid, 64, 61, 29

¹²⁸ Kirby, J. L., *The Hungerford Cartulary (The Hobhouse Cartulary)*, Wiltshire Record Society, vol. 60 (2007) 15

¹²⁹ Ibid, 15, 19, 22, 23

¹³⁰ Ibid, 39

The same cartulary also has several examples of various elements of free folding. At Winterbourne Stoke (Wilts) a grant of 1308 includes “pasture for 60 sheep with his own sheep, [presumably in the lord or his lessee’s fold] horn for horn, without payment for grass, free of grazing services and folding payments”. A later section indicates that, as well as free grazing, the grantee had the right to the manure of his sheep: “Roger shall have the pasture of 60 sheep...their sheep lying and manuring each night without hindrance by Hugh (the grantor) or his heirs.”¹³¹ This charter is, I would suggest, describing what was, in effect, a free fold and the recipient is also a freeman: being witness to other charters.¹³²

The foregoing has provided a number of examples of varying degrees of “freedom” or “liberties” for certain tenants but the following are closest to the concept of a free fold.

At the manor of Chitterne in 1247 Osbert Wicheford was granted, by Ela Countess of Warwick, a virgate of land and a house, together with “common pasture for 50 sheep...with the donor’s sheep so that they may return onto Osbert’s own land or where else he may wish to put them in his own fold (*ovile*) or elsewhere”. The implication being that Osbert not only had his own fold which pastured with the manor’s flock but was dunging his own land with them.¹³³ Osbert subsequently gifted this holding and the property changed hands twice more in the thirteenth century before being quitclaimed to the church of the Blessed Mary and St Bernard in Lacock.¹³⁴ The specifics relating to the elements of free folding “disappear”, in the documents as transcribed, during these various exchanges and one would suspect that, as Abbey property, such rights were probably not available to future tenants.

The association of free fold with freehold status of the land is made clear by two mid twelfth-century documents from North Tidworth (Wilts). One is a gift to “Roland his tenant” of “five acres of land with a messuage to be held by inheritance with as much free pasture as pertains to five acres and with a free fold and quit of all service except 1lb of pepper annually”. The second document is for a gift in alms by Roland to Bradenstoke Priory of the five acres which he been given for his homage and service. The canons to hold freely on the same terms as Roland had received the land and quit of all service except the 1lb of pepper.¹³⁵ Given that the

¹³¹ Ibid, 23

¹³² Ibid, 25

¹³³ Rogers, K. H., ed. *Lacock Abbey Charters*, Wiltshire Record Society, vol. 34, (1979), 70

¹³⁴ Ibid, 71

¹³⁵ London, V., ed. *The Cartulary of Bradenstoke Priory*, Wiltshire Record Society, vol. 35, (1979), 94

land could only be gifted to Bradenstoke Priory if it was freely held, is a further demonstration of the link between freehold and “liberty of fold”.

4.2 Discussion

The examples discussed have demonstrated a wide range of customs and services provided by the tenants of both ecclesiastical and lay manors. Villein tenants were subject to customary services and foldsuit to the lord; whilst other tenants, usually freemen, were able to buy out of the demesne fold and operate either on their own, or perhaps, what is more likely, as a group. There were also various grants of pasture and the ability to run one’s own fold within the lordly regime, although, what was in effect a free fold is not often so described.

The foregoing has included both ecclesiastical and lay estates but the differences between them are not such a simple division. Clearly those of the Bishop of Winchester or St Swithun’s priory are in many ways the direct antecedents of the later great lay estates. Hare characterises the great estates of medieval Wessex as being organised in a highly centralised fashion; and this is probably true of the Bishopric but what strikes me about the manors and vills examined above is the diversity of arrangements rather than uniformity.¹³⁶

The diversity of the lay estates may be a reflection of both the accumulation of a patchwork of properties and absenteeism. Certainly Adam de Stratton held a widely scattered estate. He was granted Sevenhampton by Countess Isabel de Forz in 1276, he already held Stratton and had obtained four manors in Berkshire, including Upton and Blewbury from the Cluniac priory of Bermondsey. The centre of Isobel de Forz’s estate was at Carisbrooke on the Isle of Wight and Stratton lived in London and there is also no record of either of them visiting Sevenhampton; nor was there a great household nearby to be supplied.¹³⁷ The Berkshire manors were similarly isolated both from their former ecclesiastical holder and Stratton.

Overall the Wiltshire chalk country presents a picture, perhaps not so dissimilar to East Anglia, and one in which the greater diversity of folding arrangements in the medieval period was later displaced by an increasingly uniform control through the manorial courts and the expansion of

¹³⁶ Hare, 161

¹³⁷ Farr, xv, xx

lordly estates. The great majority of examples of the various elements of free folding can also be associated with those who are of free status. The difficulty is to what degree the examples of what may be characterized as free fold or free pasture, and release from fold suit are exceptional? Whilst it is impossible to know the frequency of these arrangements - and they are probably rare occurrences that should not be over-emphasised - they do indicate that, as in the light soil regions of East Anglia, the large estates that existed in the early modern period in Wessex, had evolved in part from a more diverse situation in which some tenants had the liberty to operate outside of the communal controls.

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ANW/S2/16	Field book, Anmer
BEA 333, 438X7	Estate papers, Brandon
BIR 14, 396X6	Deeds
BIR 26, 396X7	Field book, East Walton
BIR 27, 396X7	Survey, East Walton
BL/CS/6/3/2/2	Terrier, Grimston
BL/MD/3	Title deeds
BL/MD/6	Title deeds
BL/MD/53	Title deeds
BL/T/ 13	Estate papers
BL/T/ 12	Estate and farm accounts
BL/T/15	Lawsuit papers
CHC 11002	Sedgeford map book
C/Sce 1/2	Inclosure award, Grimston
DCN 51/91	Sedgeford Parliamentary survey
DCN 52/10	Field book, Cressingham
DCN 59/30	Papers re Sedgeford
DCN 127/74	Hindringham field book
HARE 1061, 191X1	Charter
HARE 3147, 202X6	Petition
HARE 2755, 199X1	Lease
HIL 1/165, 871X6	Property conveyances
HIL 2/41, 882X6	Field book, Hilborough
HIL 3/1, 878X9	Lease
HIL 3/8-10, 13 878X9; HIL 3/11-12, 879X1	Papers re disputes over cullet rights
HIL 3/16, 879X1	Papers related to Hilborough estate
HIL 3/24, 879X1	Opinion re Inclosure
HIL 3/31, 879X2	Papers relating to Inclosure
KL/C 56/27	Exemplification
LEST/BH 2	Field book

LEST/EH 2	Field book Ringstead
LEST/EH 4	Field book, Ringstead
LEST/EH 8	Field book and maps, Ringstead
LEST/FF 2	Agreement re foldcourse, Ringstead
LEST/FH 2	Lease
LEST/FH 3	Lease
LEST/FQ 20	Plot Ringstead sheep's ling
LEST/IB 90	Firmal and breck book
LEST/IB 91	Fearmal and farm details
LEST/IC 57	Field book, Sedgeford
LEST/IC 58	Field and breck book
LEST/KA 12	Abstract of leases
LEST/KA 14	Abstract of leases
LEST/L8	Estate particulars
LEST/L 9	Estate particulars
LEST/OB 4	Map of Snettisham
LEST/OB 6	Map of Ringstead brecks
LEST/ OC1	Map of Sedgeford
LEST/ OD	Map of Ringstead
LEST/P 20	Book of letters
LEST/Q 32	Snettisham survey (19 th century copy)
LEST/Q37	Estate notes
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MC 1156/6&7, 806X2	Leases, Ingham
MC 1256/1, 808X8	Titchwell survey
MC 1859/48, 861X4	Kelling Hall eastate papers
MC 2234/65, 943X4	Papers re manorial dispute
MC 2411/1/20, 968X3	Feltwell extent and custumal
MC/2411/1/21, 968X5	Feltwell terrier
MC 2411/1/22, 968X5	Feltwell sheepwalk boundaries
MC 2667/19, 991X2	Cockley Cley leases, agreements
MC 40/55, 485X7	Shernborne field book
MC 40/64, 485X7	Anmer papers re foldcourses and rights
MC 98/1/18	Leases, Thetford, Downham

MC 830/1, 797X1	Survey, Cockley Cley
MS 13485 40 C 6	Agreement re sheep feeding
MS 10071	Terrier, East Wretham
MS 20417, 126X6	Lands of Massingham Priory
NAS 1/1/18/12	Extent of farm, Great Massingham
NAS 1/1/21/Choseley/9	Letter re farm
NRS 18015, 41 C 7	Terrier West Wretham
NRS 18019, 41 C 7	Account of lands, West Wretham
NRS 21365 & 21378	Map of Hillington
NRS 26966	Field book, Hillington
NRS 3503	Map of North Creak
NRS 7674	Hire of breck grounds
NRS 8524, 21B5	Exemplification re rights of common
PHI 574, 578X3	Agreement re commons
PTR 1/7, 756x4	Grant of land
PTR 1/123, 756X9	Letter re cropping shifts
PTR 3/9, 758x1	Leases, Langford Hall estate
PTR 4/8, 758X5	Common rights, Thetford (1720s)
S2/16/15	Survey of Helhoughton
TRAF 338, 89x3	Agreements re sheepwalk rights in Wroxham
WKC 5/85, 400x3	Lease
WLS VI/2, 408x2	Leases
Y/C 31/7/43	Witness statements re Thrigby sheepwalk

SUFFOLK RECORD OFFICE BURY St EDMUNDS

1167/1	Map of estate in Barrow
1167/11	Map of Little Saxham
1754/1/482	Common recovery
449/2/578	Lease
449/4/22	Indenture
449/9/12	Lease
FL 644/11/3.1	Indenture
T11/2	Tithe map of Barrow

SUFFOLK RECORD OFFICE LOWESTOFT

HA 12/E1/12/62 Grant

CAMBRIDGE RECORD OFFICE

101/P1	Map of Burrough Green
413/T5	Terrier
R/55/7/43/10	Field book Snailwell
Q/RDc/47	Inclosure map, Hinxton
Q/RDc/65	Inclosure award and map, Thriplow
Q/RDc/70	Inclosure award and map, Fowlmere

ESSEX RECORD OFFICE

D/DGd E13	Indenture
D/DGd T3	1Indenture

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