

A Review of Balks as Strip Boundaries in the Open Fields

By H. A. BEECHAM

IT was Seebohm who first alleged that individual holdings—strips or parcels—in the Open Fields of medieval England were bounded by green balks of unploughed turf.¹ This statement was accepted and copied by many later historians until the publication of the Orwins' *Open Fields* in 1938. The Orwins, in this and the subsequent edition published in 1954, disputed Seebohm's general statement on the grounds that he had misinterpreted his evidence.² They argued that any purpose balks might have had was already served by a boundary of a different sort. The action of the fixed mouldboard plough was to form lands (ridges, beds, warps, stitches, etc.) and between each land was a clearly demarcated furrow. Each man knew how many lands went to his strip and the furrow showed where each land joined the one adjacent to it. Balks would have been pointless and wasteful; and it is difficult to conceive such a wastage of land at a time when the cultivated area in each parish was barely sufficient to support the needs of the community.

Two further points made by the Orwins are as follows. "... A common complaint in the proceedings in the manorial courts is that against the man who encroached upon his neighbour's strip, which could not have happened if there were an intervening balk." Furthermore, "the compilers of the Book of Common Prayer thought it desirable to repeat the condemnation by the law of Moses of those who removed their neighbour's landmarks. Clearly such were not balks." As evidence the Orwins cite a picture which hangs in Averham Park, near Newark. Painted in 1720, it portrays the house in which it hangs, with a foreground of tillage field. This field is most clearly represented with its lands thrown up under crop, but the lands are divided only by wide furrows.

A further piece of negative evidence in support of the Orwins' case is to be found in Welbeck Abbey in the form of a portrait painted in 1716 by John Wootton. This portrait shows Lady Henrietta Harley hunting the hare on Orwell Hill, near Wimpole in Cambridgeshire, across a landscape of open-field country. Ridge and furrow are plainly shown, but there is no sign of balks. There is also a significant silence on the part of the protagonists of

¹ F. Seebohm, *The English Village Community*, London, 1883, pp. 2-3.

² C. S. and C. S. Orwin, *The Open Fields*, Oxford, 1954, pp. 43 and 44.

enclosure.¹ Arthur Young and his contemporary pamphleteers criticized the open-field system and urged its abolition, yet not one can be found who pointed to balks between strips as wasting land and harbouring weeds: this criticism was left to the text-book copyists of Seebohm.

Finally, there are, throughout the country, acres of grassland where open fields are known to have existed. Both ridge and furrow are plainly visible, but no trace of balks can be found. Had balks existed when these ploughlands were laid down to grass, traces of them would survive: whereas all we can find is land after land alternating solely with furrow.

The controversy has however revived in recent years and new evidence of balks as strip boundaries is alleged to have been found. Before proceeding to estimate the validity of this evidence, it will be as well to consider certain factors and assumptions which, in the present state of knowledge, are basic to the controversy. The first important factor to be recognized is the existence in the open-field system of various unploughed pieces of land, often called balks or meres, which neither ran between strips nor were they the boundaries of strips. At least four such distinct types of balk were found by the Orwins at Laxton.² There were, first, the paths by which a farmer could approach his land without crossing those of his neighbour. These were sometimes called common balks or footbalks, and they are to be seen clearly marked in many pre-enclosure estate maps. Canon Scobell shows clearly the meaning of the term common balk in the following quotation from a homily. "It is lamentable to see in some places how greedy men use to plough up and grate upon their neighbour's land that lieth next them; how covetous men now-a-days plough up so nigh the common balks and walks which good men aforetime made the greater and broader, partly for the commodious walk of his neighbour, partly for the better shack in harvest time, to the more comfort of his poor neighbour's cattle. It is a shame to behold the insatiableness of some covetous persons in their doings; that where their

¹ For mention of such balks in the light-soil counties alone, the following reports may be searched in vain: W. Marshall, *Rural Economy of Yorkshire*, London, 1788; *Rural Economy of Gloucestershire*, 1789; *Rural Economy of the Midland Counties*, 1790; *Rural Economy of Norfolk*, 2nd ed., London, 1795; Thomas Brown, *General View of the Agriculture of the County of Derby*, London, 1794; John Monk, *General View of the Agriculture of the County of Leicester*, London, 1794; Thomas Stone, *General View of the Agriculture of the County of Lincoln*, London, 1794; Robert Lowe, *General View of the Agriculture of the County of Nottingham*, London, 1794; Nathaniel Kent, *General View of the Agriculture of the County of Norfolk*, London, 1794; Arthur Young, *General View of the Agriculture of the County of Sussex*, London, 1793; *General View of the Agriculture of the County of Suffolk*, London, 1794; William, Jacob, and James Malcolm, *General View of the Agriculture of the County of Surrey*, London, 1794; John Boys, *General View of the Agriculture of the County of Kent*, London, 1796.

² Orwin, *op. cit.*, pp. 47, 48, 99.

ancestors left of their land a broad and sufficient bier-balk to carry the corpse to the Christian sepulture, how men pinch at such bier-balks; and now they either quite ear them up or turn the dead bodies to be borne farther about in the high streets; or else, if they leave any such meer, it is too strait for two to walk on."¹

Then, secondly, the headland of the furlong, that margin at the top and bottom of the lands where the ploughs and their teams had room to turn, was sometimes called a balk; although as a rule, the headlands would be cultivated each year after their use as a turning ground was over.

Next, in many an open field there would be awkward corners, steep banks, or low-lying wet places which would be unsuitable for cultivation. These were left as unploughed balks, and, in Laxton and elsewhere, were known as 'sikes'.

The fourth type of balk noted by the Orwins at Laxton was the half-balk or 'stintin'. This was an arrangement necessitated when the "lands of one furlong abut direct on to those of another, or they finish at right angles to the outside land of the next furlong, without the intervention of any common balk or headland."² Here either cultivator had the right to tread $2\frac{1}{2}$ yards on to his neighbour's land in order to cultivate, manure, and harvest his own. When the lands met end to end this margin of $2\frac{1}{2}$ yards was known at Laxton in the seventeenth century as a half-balk. It is known today as a 'stintin'. Like the headlands, these half-balks were, after use for purposes of access, cultivated, sown, and harvested with the rest.

Paths and headlands would of course constitute boundaries to the furlongs themselves, and it is presumably such balks that J. A. Venn describes as "... the numerous balks which would have obtruded themselves, between the furlongs in the arable field at, say, Rampton ..."³ Parish roads, common balks, and sikes would serve as boundaries to the two or three huge fields themselves. Moreover, the 1840 Tithe Map of the then unenclosed parish of Easington, Oxfordshire, shows a tract of land 2 r. 12 p. in extent, called in the Award a "balk," and under "common cultivation," which served as a boundary between this parish and that of Chalgrove.⁴ It is important that the existence of such balks in the open fields should be recognized and acknowledged. Their existence is recorded in manorial documents. If it is forgotten, and if, to the unwary historian, 'balks' mean only strip boundaries,

¹ 'The Common Fields at Upton St Leonards and the Recent Enclosure', *Cotteswold Naturalists' Field Club*, XIII, pt. III, 1900, p. 219.

² Orwin, *op. cit.*, p. 99.

³ J. A. Venn, *Foundations of Agricultural Economics*, Cambridge, 1933, p. 44.

⁴ Bodleian Library, Oxford.

a most confused interpretation of such documentary references may well result.

In a wider context than that of open-field farming, the balk or mere is of course as recognized a form of field boundary as is the hedge, ditch, wall, or fence. In many arable areas, provided stock does not have to be kept in (or out) and provided that the protective shelter of the higher form of boundary is not required, these balks serve a very useful purpose. Their maintenance cost, for one thing, compared with other forms, is negligible.¹ This being the case, balks found as field boundaries today can scarcely indicate (as Venn seems to have thought) that they are derived from strip boundaries of the pre-enclosure period.² Additional evidence would be required to support such a view. In some areas balks have, as field boundaries, a practical utility which is sufficient explanation of their existence without resort to an unsubstantiated medieval ancestry.

The issue is further complicated by certain farming practices now rendered obsolete and for the most part forgotten. The first of these was noted by the Orwins as having misled some writers, including Venn.³ This was the practice "once pursued on some of the surface clay-land in England which has long since gone out of cultivation, of leaving a wide strip between each of the narrow 'lands' unploughed to facilitate more efficient drainage. . . Examples of these 'green furrows' as they are called, may be found on the lias clay south of Stratford-on-Avon, but they were not divisions between different tenancies. This land was so wet and impervious that it could only be tilled at all by ploughing it up in little dry and narrow 'lands', with a wide space between each into which the water could drain and where, in flat parts, it could lie."⁴ Such unsuitable land would have dropped out of cultivation with the vanished need to be self-supporting, in respect of corn, both on the parochial and on the national scale. Moreover, the introduction of the underground drainage system in the nineteenth century would render such practices obsolete. But the photograph which the Orwins publish shows traces of these green furrows (or 'fithers' as they were called) at Crimscote in Warwickshire between lands now covered in turf; and it is not surprising to find that this practice bore the recorded sanction of manorial custom. It may of course be urged that the Orwins were wrong in their interpretation of this

¹ See Appendix, Glos., Westcote.

² "... anyone desiring to see balks in abundance need only traverse the Southern parts of Cambridgeshire or the North-Eastern quarter of Hertfordshire where, although enclosure has technically and legally overrun the country, yet physically it is non-existent, and the place of the hedgerows, and boundaries between individual fields, is still supplied by these earthen ridges."—Venn, *op. cit.*, p. 44.

³ *Ibid.*, Plate I, opp. p. 32.

⁴ Orwin, *op. cit.*, p. 46.

phenomenon and of the photograph, and that we are looking, in fact, at the remains of balks between strips. But these green furrows, as can be seen, plainly occur between lands, and to identify them as strip boundaries would be to identify strip and land—an error to which later reference will be made. Furthermore, as will be seen below, the manorial court orders enjoined that the green furrows should be left between every land—not between parcels of land nor between the outside lands of individual holdings.

Two further practices may be remarked on, which, although their extent is unknown, might in their surviving traces be misleading. The Rev. St John Priest recommended that, as a method of levelling ridges, "small lands or ridges about two yards and a half wide should be formed in what are now furrows, as several farms have done in such instances, so that between the broad ridges there lies a small ridge, forming two furrows instead of one between the broad ridges."¹ Adam Murray recommended Warwickshire farmers to adopt a method which he had observed near Perth for reducing and levelling broad high-gathered ridges. The farmer, whom he had observed practising this method, "began with throwing a drain into every furrow, thus designing by one operation to dry the ground, to equalize the soil, and to give it a fallow. When these operations were completed, he gathered up a small ridge into the furrows above the drains to protect them from the surface water."² Either of these practices, although undertaken perhaps in comparatively modern times, might well leave traces discoverable to the eye, to the aerial camera, and to the excavator, which might appear to be evidence of boundary balks between strips.

The recently revived controversy would appear to involve two fallacies. The first of these is the land-strip identification which, as will be seen below, appears to have led Dr Kerridge to see the green furrows between lands on heavy soil as balks dividing strips. It should perhaps be pointed out that the term 'strip' is an invention of historians. It is not to be found in documents, and there is no evidence that it was known to, or used by, the open-field farmers. The word 'land', on the other hand, is not only commonly found in documents relating to the open-field system, but is in current use today among farmers by whom its meaning is clearly understood. 'Strip' is, however, a convenient term to use for the holdings scattered throughout the open fields, and its meaning is for the most part understood.

The classical view was that each man's strip approximated to as much land as he could plough in a day.³ This was the customary acre, varying in size

¹ *General View of the Agriculture of Buckingham*, London, 1810, p. 130.

² *General View of the Agriculture of the County of Warwick*, London, 1815, pp. 140, 141.

³ Seebohm, *op. cit.*, pp. 124 ff.

according to locality, but smaller on the whole than the statutory acre. The size of lands, however, varied very greatly, depending upon the nature of the soil and upon local contour.¹ On wet, heavy soils lands would be narrow, with frequent water furrows: on lighter soils they would be wider. On heavy soils they would be high: on drier soils relatively flat. As to length, on flat land they might run the full 'furrow-long' of 220 yards; but in undulating country with a changing contour they would be necessarily short. The Orwins found at Laxton that "the strips, or parcels, as shown upon the map (1624) were composed of one, two, three, or of many lands."² But Laxton was not exceptional in this respect. A deed of sale relating to Upton St Leonards, Gloucestershire, in 1624, shows that the number of lands which strips contained varied greatly, as did the size of the lands themselves.³ The sale was of 21 strips in all. The smallest of these was only $\frac{1}{4}$ acre, consisting of three 'short acres', and the largest was $2\frac{1}{4}$ acres in extent: the average size of the strip $1\frac{1}{8}$ acres. The smallest lands, or ridges as they were called here, are shown in a holding of fourteen of them measuring only 2 acres: the largest in a strip of two ridges measuring 1 acre. The size of the lands varied, therefore, on an average from $\frac{1}{7}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ acre. The number of lands to a strip varied from "1 ridge in Rousemore's feelde, 1 forehead in same ($\frac{1}{2}$ a)," to "14 ridges in Northill field (2a) called Woodcoke's peeces." Countless examples of the plurality of lands to strips can be found, but nevertheless, the erroneous identification of land with strip is still occurring.⁴

The second fallacy seems to have resulted from some confused endowment of the fixed mouldboard plough with the properties of the one-way plough, or else from ignorance of the former and of its workings. With the

¹ The introduction of underground drains, running across the fields, modified this variety, but not to the extent that might be imagined. On some of the heavy clay land of Warwickshire, with the ploughing campaign of the early war years, the narrow high-backed lands were widened, and thus, to a certain degree, obliterated by wider lands of a more convenient shape for tractor ploughing. In the space of a few years, however, the old high-backs were restored since they were found essential for drainage. For this information I am indebted to Mr A. Beecham, Compton Scorpion Manor, Warwickshire.

² Orwin, *op. cit.*, p. 101.

³ Glos. R.O./D127/921.

⁴ Initiated perhaps by G. M. Trevelyan. "The outline of many of these 'strips', ploughed by the farmers of Saxon, mediaeval, and Tudor-Stuart times can still clearly be seen. The 'ridge and furrow' of pasture fields that once were arable is one of the commonest features of the English landscape today. . . . Often, though not always, the curved 'ridge' or 'land', thus clearly visible today, represents a 'strip' that was held and worked long ago by a peasant farmer, who also held and worked many other strips in other parts of the 'open field.'"—*English Social History*, London, 1944, p. 4; and expressed with far less guarded emphasis by M. W. Beresford in 'Ridge and Furrow and the Open Fields', *Economic History Review*, Second Ser., 1, 1948-9, pp. 34-45.

one-way plough, it is true, a field can be ploughed up and down, from one side to the other, without the necessity to create lands divided by furrows. It can be argued, therefore, that where the one-way plough was used upon the open fields, and furrows were not needed for drainage purposes, some other form of strip demarcation might be necessary and that balks might in such areas be the substitute.¹ The one-way plough, common to Kent, by a long tradition, has recently been discovered to be of greater antiquity than was previously thought. Mr F. G. Payne has identified it as being that portrayed in the tenth-century Cottonian MSS., Tiberius B.v. and Julius A.v.² Whether, however, it was used in this country at such an early date and whether it was *ever* used outside a few, small, limited localities has yet to be proved. For, as Mr Payne remarks, "It is the origin of these pictures that is open to doubt."³

The one-way plough was, of course, adopted wherever steam ploughing was introduced in the second half of the last century. When the steam engine was discarded, the one-way plough gave place once more to the fixed mould-board plough—and this preference, running on into comparatively recent times, is perhaps significant. Compared with the fixed mouldboard plough, it is structurally weak and less able to withstand the strains of heavy soil. Generally speaking, on flat land furrows, and therefore the fixed mould-board plough, were needed for drainage. In hilly country, the one-way plough, together with the temptation to plough always downhill, would result in soil erosion. The concept of 'ploughing flat', as described above, is a perfectly valid one, but much more evidence must be forthcoming before it can be used to prove the existence of balks for strip-demarcation throughout a wide area of medieval open-field country.

The case for balks, however, in relation to 'ploughing flat' has ramifications considerably more obscure than the obvious connection between one-way ploughing and the absence of dividing furrows, as stated above. Having read or written of ridge and furrow, and having seen it covered with turf in high-back country, it seems difficult for some to see ridge and furrow at all under less spectacular conditions. The eye that can no longer see a narrow high-backed land can see no land at all. Perhaps the soil is under plough and gone is the revealing turf with its convenient shadows. The eye that can no longer see the shaded, dark green furrow can see no furrow at all, however clear-cut it may lie for the ploughman's eye. Further confusion appears to

¹ M. Nightingale, 'Ploughing and Field Shape', *Antiquity*, no. 105, March 1953, pp. 23-6.

² 'The Plough in Ancient Britain', *Archaeological Journal*, CIV, 1948, p. 103.

³ Mr Nightingale, while making use of Mr Payne's interpretation of one of these pictures for the purposes of his argument, omits all reference to this, its doubtful authenticity.

have risen from the ambiguity of the term 'ridge' in the phrase 'ridge and furrow'. This term is sometimes used to mean lands and at other times to mean high-backed lands. In either sense, however, the furrow is indispensable and its meaning unambiguous. This fact is sometimes overlooked.

Hence Dr Kerridge makes the mistake of supposing that because in some places lands were kept low, and the level of the fields flat, somehow or other there were no lands, or, at any rate, there were no furrows.¹ Furrows were not needed for drainage purposes and so there were no furrows. As there were no furrows, there must have been balks. The following quotation will show that Dr Kerridge had not in mind the one-way plough which would, indeed, have resulted in an absence of furrows. "Ridging up the land was unknown in Chalk Wiltshire. . . In Northumberland, on dry lands, the ridges 'are quite flat, and alternately gathered and split'. In Hampshire, and Wessex generally, 'throughout this whole country we all plough the ground upon the flat, and thwart the furrows in stirrings.' In fine, 'in the Open Champion where the land is dry, they do not lay up their ridges as in other places.' It is precisely this sort of tillage that accounts for the presence of grass balks in the open fields of the chalk countries of England. Without water furrows, a grass balk was needed as a dividing line between land and land. Such grass balks obtained throughout the open fields of Chalk Wiltshire, and in all chalk countries generally. . ."² The mention of ridging, albeit the ridges were flat, means that the fixed mouldboard plough was in use, laying out the fields into lands. But because these lands were not high-backs and because the furrows between them were not needed for drainage, Dr Kerridge supposes that the furrows did not exist. This is his first fundamental mistake: his second is the more common one of identifying strip and land and of supposing that the demarcations between holdings must therefore lie between each land. Both errors are clearly stated in the sentence already quoted, "Without water furrows, a grass balk was needed as a dividing line between land and land."

Dr Kerridge's conclusions, and their erroneous foundation, were noted by the Orwins in the recent edition of their book.³ Dr Kerridge, however, has since attempted to prove that balks were strip demarcations not only in the chalk-down country but also throughout the midland plain.⁴ In the case of the first-named region he now wisely abandons any attempt to endow the fixed mouldboard plough with the properties of the one-way plough; and he

¹ 'Ridge and Furrow and Agrarian History', *Economic History Review*, Second Ser., IV, 1951.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 18 and 19.

³ Orwin, *op. cit.*, pp. 49 and 50.

⁴ 'A Reconsideration of Some Former Husbandry Practices', *Agricultural History Review*, III, 1955, pp. 32-40.

no longer suggests that where water furrows were not needed for drainage purposes, no furrows existed. He proffers two different sorts of arguments. One proof is based on the existence of lynchets. These he thinks were formed by plough cultivation, because he has read in G. Atwell's *Faithful Surveyor*, 1662, p. 90, an account of the way a road was built, by means of the plough, to run up a hill taking a spiral or zig-zag course.¹ It is difficult to see the relevance of this feat of road building, but how lynchets were formed is apparently of no account. "Whether or not the terraces and steeps were cut or resulted from cultivation—and the two explanations are reconcilable—does not matter for this discussion."²

What does matter, apparently, is that Marshall, Cobbett, and Jethro Tull saw lynchets under cultivation in their own time. The statements of these writers he supports by other evidence for the cultivation of lynchets. "That the common field upon the 'walls' at Amesbury in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was such terraced cultivation can scarcely be doubted." His three MS. references supporting this statement cannot, however, be traced. "At Kensworth there were 'iij rodas iacentes super lez lynches super stokynghill'." This is a quotation of a fragment of a footnote in H. L. Gray's *English Field Systems*, p. 377. But the evidence of the footnote in its entirety, and the passage in the text to which it refers, seem to prove that the open field did not exist at this place. "At Clothall some of the lynchet terraces were cultivated until recently." Dr Kerridge cites Venn as his authority for this statement, but here again the reference cannot be traced.³ "Similar terracing is to be found on the sides of some of the hills in northern England and is well described in Dr Raistrick's book on Malham."⁴ Dr Raistrick states, in his book, that the lynchets were made by plough and by Anglian settlers, but he offers no new evidence, nor indeed evidence of any sort for this statement.

The statements of Marshall, Cobbett, and Jethro Tull, together with the evidence examined above, are supposed to prove, in some way not explained, that lynchets, when they occurred, were an integral part of the open-field system. The steeps between the platforms of lynchets must therefore have been balks between strips: so, after all, there were balks between the strips of the open fields. However, the fact that lynchets are found under cultivation at any period of history means merely that farmers will take land, if they need it, as they find it and make the best of it.

Moreover, if, as the Orwins maintained, these lynchets were formed by an agency other than the plough,⁵ then their particular formation, that is to say the platforms with grass banks or steeps between them, can have no con-

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

² *Ibid.*, p. 35.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 35, n. 7.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 35, n. 8.

⁵ Orwin, *op. cit.*, pp. 175-9.

nection with open-field farming, can throw no light on its system, and can offer no evidence as to the existence of balks between strips within that system. Far from not mattering, the origin of linchets—by what agency they were formed—is, in fact, vital to any use of them in an argument of this sort.

Next follows what may be described as a philological argument "... 'Land-sherds', another variant of the provincial name for boundary balks, may be taken in evidence. Formerly, I contented myself with observing that the terms *linch*, *linchet*, *lincherd*, *landshere*, *mere*, *balk*, and *wall*, all had, in the chalk country, the same general meaning of boundary balks in the common fields, this being the meaning attached to some of them by John Worlidge." Here we are referred back to a footnote in Dr Kerridge's previous article.¹ In this earlier footnote we are told that Worlidge defined the word 'dool' as meaning "a green balk or mound between the Ploughed Lands in Common Fields." But an examination of Worlidge's definition shows that Dr Kerridge has misquoted him. Worlidge defined the word dool as "a great" (not green) "balk or mound between the Ploughed Lands in Common Fields," and this "great" mound suggests far more nearly a sike than a strip of land between two holdings. This argument of Dr Kerridge's illustrates the danger referred to above, of overlooking the many different types of balks to be found in the open fields, and consequently assuming that the mere appearance of the word landsherd, balk, or any equivalent term, can be taken alone as evidence that balks were strip boundaries.

Of the midland plain, Dr Kerridge states, "There were, in fact, boundary balks in the common fields here as elsewhere . . ."² For evidence, Dr Kerridge quotes J. Morton's *Natural History of Northants*, 1712, p. 14, and Marshall's *Review of the Reports to the Board of Agriculture from the Eastern Departments of England*, 1811, pp. 135 and 136, as describing green furrows of exactly the same sort, and in exactly the same soil conditions, as those described by the Orwins at Crimscote in Warwickshire. He next cites the Rev. St John Priest's *General View of the Agriculture of Buckinghamshire* as his authority for stating that "In Buckinghamshire, open-field ridges were 2 ft high and the sheep commoned on the balks between them." Dr Kerridge would, however, appear to have misread the passage, for although the ridges are described as being two feet above the level of the furrows between them, there is no statement to the effect that sheep were pastured on balks between the ridges. The writer, in fact, goes on to describe, on p. 137, the bad state of the furrows. "The next loss I shall mention is in the furrows, it is

¹ *Economic History Review*, 1951, p. 19, n. 8.

² *Agricultural History Review*, III, 1955, p. 37.

twofold: one caused by the great depth of the furrows below the crown of the ridges, and the other by their deviations from straight lines. In the former case the water stands so much in the furrows, that it not only destroys all vegetation in the corn and grasses intended to be cultivated, for two yards on each side of them, but encourages the growth of all sorts of weeds and rubbish." This description does not suggest that grazing would be possible between the ridges.

Moreover, Dr Kerridge states that "references to greensward balks dividing and bounding the properties and occupations lying dispersedly in the common fields of the plain countries are superabundant. Sometimes the grass boundary balks are distinguished from the ridgeways and slades by the designation 'narrow' or 'foot', alluding to their width. Frequently the balks, green meres, or green furrows are described as lying between neighbour and neighbour. In some townships these balks were one foot wide, in some eighteen inches, in some two feet, in some three or four. Sometimes they were wider between acres than between roods."¹ These assertions are supported by no argument or illustration. Dr Kerridge's evidence consists of two references to printed works and forty-four references to MSS. The validity of these references will now be examined.

Sir T. Lawson Tancred, the first authority cited, says: "The large fields are divided into furlongs or fourshots, and these were subdivided into a large number of long narrow strips, of about 1 acre or $\frac{1}{2}$ acre each, called 'lands'.—The lands were separated from each other laterally by balks."² This passage occurs in the introductory remarks, and no evidence to support it is offered, nor may any be found in the three Court Rolls which follow. The statement, with its erroneous identification of strips with lands, was possibly derived from Seebohm or from one of his followers.

The second authority cited is F. S. Colman, who in *A History of Barwick-in-Elmet*³ notes among 'Paines' formerly levied in the Manor of Barwick and Scoles, "None shall plough away any part of their neighbour's lands or balk between neighbour and neighbour or between lords and tenants . . ." These balks may have been green furrows, headlands, or half-balks—most probably the latter. Had there existed in this manor boundary balks between strips it would not have been possible to plough away a neighbour's land, or necessary to forbid such procedure.

Before proceeding to an examination of the unpublished evidence, it

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

² "Three 17th-century Court Rolls of Aldborough", *Yorkshire Archaeological Journal*, xxxv, 1943, p. 202.

³ Thoresby Soc., xvii, 1908, p. 127.

must be stated that the references to this are given in exactly the form in which they were given in Dr Kerridge's article.¹ Exception has been made, however, in cases where soil conditions seemed important. Here an elaboration of location has been attempted, chiefly by the addition of the name of the county concerned.

Of the forty-four MSS. referred to, one could not be found.² In three MSS. nothing could be found which seemed relevant to Dr Kerridge's statements.³ In six, although balks (in one case "grass ends") are mentioned, there is nothing to show that these were not sikes, common ways, headlands, or stintins.⁴ The last MS. cited states: "Item, that No person shall Mow or Stake any Foot-baulk on pain for each default 10." This is perhaps a case where Dr Kerridge has interpreted the word foot as indicating width, but equally the word may be interpreted as indicating purpose: in other words, this footbalk was a footpath. Common sense will reinforce this second interpretation if consideration is given to the practical difficulties involved in tethering (or staking) an animal to the confines of a piece of ground one foot wide!

Nine of Dr Kerridge's references make no mention of balks or meres but suggest that in some places there were green furrows between the lands. These were mown for hay, and where width permitted, were grazed by tethered animals. Both mowing and grazing were usually restricted according to the time of year.⁵ The first three may be quoted as examples. Presentment "of John Wilkins for mowing of furrows after St James day contrary

¹ For transcription, and for help with transcription, of all relevant passages in the MSS. cited by Dr Kerridge, I am indebted to the following, and to their assistants: Mr P. A. King, Northants R.O.; Mr L. Fox, Shakespeare's Birthplace Library; Mr E. H. Sargeant, Worcs. R.O.; Mr P. G. Bates, Cambs. R.O.; Mr A. C. Wood, Warks. R.O.; Miss M. Gollancz, W.S.L., Staffs.; Miss A. J. Godber, Beds R.O.; Mr M. G. Rathbone, Wilts R.O.; Mr B. Ashton; and Miss J. Riddell.

² P.R.O., DL, RS, Ct. R., bdle 82, no. 1133, m. 29.

³ Northants R.O., Montagu Coll. Misc. Ledger 145, p. 503; box 1346, box 20, no. 32, m. 16; WSL, Ct. R. Shenstone 12 Oct. 18 Chas. I.

⁴ B.M., Add. MS. 36908, ff. 8, 15v; Add. R. 54166; P.R.O., DL, Ct. R. bdle 106, no. 1535, m. 6; RS, Exch., Q.R., Deps. by Comm. 26 Eliz., Trin. 8; SOA, Willoughby de Broke Coll., 1393a, Ct. Bk. Sowe 6 Apr. 8 Geo. I; Northants R.O., Montagu Coll., Misc. Ledger 129, Polebrook 7 Oct. 1727.

⁵ B.M., Add. MS. 36875, f. 25, Whitchurch, Worcs.; SOA, Man. Docs. Ct. R. Alveston and Tiddington, Warks., 21 Oct. 9 Jas. I; Ct. R. Alveston and Tiddington, Warks., 11 Apr. 18 Chas. II; Ct. R. Whitchurch, Worcs., 12 Oct. 1711; Willoughby de Broke Coll. 703a, Extracts Ct. R. Barford, Warks., 30 Sept. 1 Jas I; 1194 Ct. R. Barford, Warks., 6 Apr. 11 Chas. I; Northants R.O., box 1352, box 36, no. 28, Ct. R. Caldecote, Hunts., 11 Dec. 5 Chas. I; Isham of Lamport Coll., 128, Ct. R. Lamport, Scaldewell, Northants, 30 Apr. 18 Eliz.; P.R.O., Ct. R., GS, bdle 207, no. 42, Lemyngton cum Lillyngton, Warks, 5 Apr. 2 Ed. VI.

to a former paine"; "Item. We payne that every man shall leave his forrow between land and land four foot and betwixt fether and fether two foot in payne to forfeit . . ."; and "No inhabitant within the said manour shall bait or tye any horse or beast in the furrows of any corn fields until the corn be first out . . . none shall be baited or tyed unless the stake be upon their own land or furrow until it be carried." These places are all, however, those in which the soil conditions are similar to Crimscote, Warks., where green furrows were for drainage.¹

One document refers specifically to a mere, and five more to balks, which appear to have been green furrows because restrictions were placed on mowing or grazing them.² The last reference may be quoted as illustration of this point, although, perhaps, "the small balkes lying betwixt the grayne" may have been footpaths: "Item it is ordered and agreed upon that noe person or persons shall keepe or lead any Cowes or bullocks upon the small balkes lying betwixt the grayne in the fields of ffoxton aforesaid at any time from May day untill harvest bee home upon payne . . . Item it is ordered and agreed upon that none shall lead any horses upon the narrow balkes of the fields of this Towne untill harvest be home upon payne . . ." Once again, these balks are situated on heavy land where green furrows may well have been needed.

Without knowing exactly where in each manor the arable fields were situated, reference to soil conditions cannot be as precise as would be desired. The following table, however, shows the types of soil prevailing at the present settlement sites of the nine places for which similarity of soil conditions is claimed with that of Crimscote, Warwickshire. The superficial geology of the Chatteris area indicates that the settlement itself stands on a gravel capping, while the surrounding fields are based on rather heavy soils derived from Kimmeridge Clay and Boulder Clay.³ For the other eight places no drift geology data are available at the present time.⁴

¹ Orwin, *op. cit.*, p. 46.

² SOA, Throckmorton Coll., Ct. R. Throckmorton, Worcs., 13 Oct. 1725; Leigh Coll., Ct. R. Ratley, Worcs., 20 Oct. 1602; Northants R.O., Daventry Coll. 533, Hellidon orders 20 Oct. 29 Chas. II; 20 Oct. 36 Chas. II; 540, Hellidon orders 16 Oct. 14 Chas. II, Hellidon, Northants; Cambs. R.O., L.64, Ct. R. Foxton with Wimbush and Chatteris, Cambs., 7 Dec. 1665.

³ Cf. R. W. L. Melbourne, M.A., *The Land of Britain*, Pt. 71 (Isle of Ely), London, 1940, p. 268.

⁴ For the geological data I am indebted to Prof. K. C. Edwards and to Dr C. A. M. King, and for their interpretation to Prof. E. G. Hallsworth.

<i>Place</i>	<i>County</i>	<i>Grid. Ref.</i>	<i>Solid Geology</i>
Whitchurch	Worcs.	42/215489	Keuper Marl near Lower Lias outcrop
Alveston & Tiddington	Warks.	42/235565	Keuper Marl
Barford	"	42/222558	" "
Caldecote near Upton	Hunts.	42/271608	" "
Scaldewell		52/175785	Oxford Clay
Scaldewell	Northants.	42/769726	Upper Lias Clay/Inferior Oolite
Leamington with Lillington	Warks.	42/316655	Keuper Marl
Throckmorton		42/324673	Keuper Marl
Throckmorton	Worcs.	32/981499	Lower Lias
Ratley	Warks.	42/382473	Mid. Lias (Marl stone)
Hellidon	Northants.	42/516582	Mid./Upper Lias
Chatteris	Cambs.	52/392860	Kimmeridge Clay

Where the settlements are marginal, exact knowledge of the location of the arable fields referred to in the documents is important. If the fields at Scaldewell were on Upper Lias Clay, then the need for green furrows was highly probable, but unlikely if they were based on Inferior Oolite. The Mid. Lias at Ratley makes the need probable; the type of soil at the other eight settlements makes it highly probable.

Thirteen more of the documents cited refer specifically to balks between lands, as distinct from furrows.¹ They have, however, a characteristic extremely damaging to Dr Kerridge's contention that they were boundary balks "dividing and bounding the properties and occupations lying dispersedly in the common fields." For in every MS. they are described as lying between *every* land in the field or fields. Since many properties and occupations must have consisted of more than one land, then these balks lying between *every* land cannot possibly have been boundary demarcations.

Thus of the forty-four references provided as evidence of boundary balks between strips, thirty-eight prove on examination to contain no evidence at all. Of the six remaining references, four will be considered when they are duplicated in a later context.² The other two will be considered now.

The first of these refers to a field book of the Manor of Passenham, Northants (26 Sept. 8 Eliz.).³ In the East Field of this manor there were

¹ P.R.O., DL, RS, bdle 106, no. 1535, m. 1; m. 5; Chanc. Proc. ser. 1, Jas. I, bdle S. 29, no. 7, m. 1; SOA, Trevelyan Coll., Ct. R. Snitterfield 20 Oct. 1660; Northants R.O., Montagu Coll., Misc. Ledger 129, Weekley, 12 Oct. 1721; Luddington, 12 Oct. 1728; 145, p. 71; p. 157-8; p. 469; box 1336, box 7, no. 72, Ct. Bk Weekley 4 Oct. 1707; No. 66/10 Ct. R. 12 Oct. 1721; box 1342, box P, pt. 2, Ct. Files Dondon in Quainton, 10 Sept. 1700, field orders; Daventry Coll. 573a, Ravensthorpe agreement, 1721.

² P.R.O., DL, RS, bdle 106, no. 1534, m. 6; SOA, Throckmorton Coll., Ct. Bk. Stoneleigh, p. 23; Warks. R.O., MR. 14, copy Ct. R. Leamington Hastings, 25 Aug. 1630; MR. 16/9.

³ P.R.O., DL, RS, bdle 8, no. 6a, p. 3.

90 strips of lands of which two were balked on both sides and seven more strips were balked on one side. No balks are described as being in the West Field. In the North Field, of a total of 112 strips, two were balked on both sides and ten strips were balked on one side only. A terrier of lands held by Richard Campion in South Luffenham in 1615 affords similar evidence of balked strips.¹ In the South Field of South Luffenham² Richard Campion held 33 strips of land of which four were balked on both sides and eleven were balked on one side. In the East Field he owned 42 strips of which one was balked on both sides and eight on one side only. In the West Field he owned 33 strips; one was balked on both sides, seven on one only. In both these MSS. it will be observed that a very few balks are described as occurring among a very great number of strips. In view of the various types of balks to be met with in the open fields of any district—foot-paths, headlands, sikes, and so on—it would be surprising if these did not occur as important landmarks in terriers and similar documents. Such balks, of course, bounded the lands which lay adjacent to them, and therefore bounded the strips which contained these as their outside lands. These sorts of balks are to be seen in estate maps and it is not surprising that they are to be found in documents as well. But in both these documents mention of them occurs with insufficient frequency to justify the view that their main purpose was to demarcate the strips next to which they are described as lying.

Dr Kerridge goes on to say: "When a land had been a middle land, it did not have to be balked on each side, but after it was exchanged and had become an end land, it had to be balked on one side to provide a boundary between neighbour and neighbour." His evidence for this statement is taken from a deposition concerning the ownership of lands in Cotton End in Northamptonshire,³ part of which reads as follows, "And at the same time two of the said lands had at every end two bawkes and the other being the middle land had no bawke since which time this middle land being exchanged by one Thomas Ayle with the said George Ravenscroft was marked with bawkes as the others are . . ." But surely only a very hurried reading could suggest that the balks mentioned were running lengthwise *between* the lands. The writer states clearly that the two outside lands had balks at *each end*: that is to say, they were headlands or stintins. If the writer had meant sides when he said ends, then the two outside lands would have had balks running down both

¹ Leics. R.O., Linden Hall MS. 343.

² See Appendix, Rutland, South Luffenham.

³ *Art. cit.*, p. 38, n. 3, P.R.O., Exch. Q.R., Deps. by Comm. 26 Eliz., Trin. 8, dep. by Wm. Harrowden.

of their sides. If this had been the case, the effect must have been, inevitably, to give the middle land balks down its sides too. This is, however, contrary to what the writer explicitly states.

Dr Kerridge next states: "There is, however, abundant evidence that it was forbidden by customary law to plough up the boundary balks during any year of the field course, especially and specifically where the lands were not middle but end lands and the balks were boundaries between neighbour and neighbour." This assertion is supported by no argument or illustration other than a footnote containing references: one to the printed work by F. S. Colman which has already been discussed, and thirty-two to MSS.¹ The validity of these MSS. references will now be examined.

One MS. could not be traced.² In three instances no mention whatsoever could be found in the MSS. of the ploughing up of balks, let alone of the ploughing up of those bounding end lands or between neighbour and neighbour.³ In fifteen cases the ploughing up of balks is forbidden but the type of balk is not specified as being either between land or between strip.⁴ Some of these fifteen documents, indeed, indicate fairly plainly what type of balk was in question. For instance, in the Tempsford Court Roll of 1617, "Item it is ordered anew that noe man shall eare or plough up any Baulkes or Common Headons being atte theire Lands ends further than in former and ancyent tyme it usually hath beene upon payne . . ." Here the phrase "being atte theire lands ends" which qualifies both Baulkes and Common Headons, suggests stintins. Or possibly "Baulkes" is being used as synonymous with "Common Headons" (or headlands). And in the Stivichall Court Roll of 3 Oct. 1724 we find: "Ordered that no one shall plough half Balks between their land and the land adjoining on payne of 10-0." This half balk was, it may be assumed, a stintin where the two lots of land met without the intervening headland.

In five cases, the ploughing up of green furrows was forbidden, although

¹ *Art. cit.*, p. 39, n. 2.

² Northants R.O., Montagu Coll., box 1352, box 18, no. 160, Barnwell orders 1 Dec. 1614.

³ Leics. R.O., box 311, Leire arts. of agreement 1689; Northants R.O., Montagu Coll., box 1342, box P, pt. 2, Ct. Files Dondon in Quainton 10 Sept. 1700; SOA, Man. Docs., Ct. Files Whitchurch, pains and orders, 24 Apr. 1588.

⁴ B.M., Add. MS. 36908, f.3v; Beds. R.O. DD/TW 10/2/9, Ct. R. Clapham 14 Apr. 8 Chas. I; BS. 1276, Ct. R. Tempsford 1617; L. 26/563, Ct. R. Harrold 2 May 9 Chas I; Northants R.O., Westmorland Coll., box 7, no. 71, Yarwell presentmt. bk. f.5; Finch-Hatton Coll. 834, Gretton bye-laws 24 Oct. 1695; 991, Ct. R. Weldon Magna 1728; Ecton Coll. 20, Ct. R. 9 Oct. 1713; 7a, Ct. R. 1 May 1701; 9, Ct. R. 14 Oct. 1743; Daventry Coll. 573c, Ravensthorpe agreement 1760; Montagu Coll., Misc. Ledger 145, p. 236; Higham Ferrers Burgess R. 1696-1725, field orders, 23 Apr. 1719; SOA, Willoughby de Broke Coll. 1393a, Ct. Bk. Sowe 6 Apr. 8 Geo. I; Hood Coll., Ct. R. Stivichall 3 Oct. 1724.

the MSS. contain nothing to connect the furrows with lands which were not middle but end lands, or to suggest that the furrows were boundaries between neighbour and neighbour.¹ The last of these may be quoted. "Item that no man shall kare up his furrows and hades but shall leave them sufficient at the discretion of the overseers viz. three yards on a side at the hades and three foot broad the furrow." The three townships referred to—Alveston and Tiddington together with Whitchurch—are on Keuper Marl, and Luddington is on Boulder Clay. On both types of soil green furrows were probably a necessity.

Six references alone among the odd thirty support Dr Kerridge's statement that it was forbidden to plough balks specifically where these occurred between neighbours.² The relevant passages in these six MSS. read as follows. "It is agreed that there shall be no baulkes plowed betwixt Neighbour & Neighbour" (Thurlaston, Warks., 1719); "They do agree and do amerce William Dowler . . . for ploughing away part of a meare betwixt the land of Richard Thornton and the said William Dowler" (Kempsey, Worcs., 1656); "Item that everye of the inha'tantes of Shenston that have plowed upp, any of the balkes in the fieldes betwixt theires and their neighbours landes, that before the feast daye of St. John Baptist next cominge they and everie of them soe offendinge doe laye the same downe againe and soe suffer the same to lye as formerlye" (Shenstone, Staffs., 1633); "We present Tho: Clarke for plowing away a balke between Thomas Pytchley and himself at Larkshill" (Hellidon, Northants, 1714); "It is ordered and agreed that noe landholder shall plow any greensward from any balkes that lye betweene landes and lands" (Hellidon, Northants, 1677); and "The Jurors aforesaid Do upon their oath present John Hudson for ploughing up a Balk which lay betwixt him and Widow Garlick . . ." (Stoneleigh, Warks., 1742).

Two further of the MSS. cited may be quoted, since, although these do not support Dr Kerridge's statement that it was forbidden to plough up balks between neighbour and neighbour, they are not without bearing on his case. "It is agreed that there shall be balks layd down in Blackfern field for every acre the balke two foot wide for three roods a foot and half and for two roods a foot" (Urchester, Northants, 1711)³; and "Item. That every inhabitant in the parish of Leamington Hastings shall make and keep a

¹ BM. Add. R. 44654, Ct. Whitchurch, 7 May 1740; Northants R.O., Montagu Coll. Misc. Ledger, 145, p. 451, Luddington; SOA, Man. Docs., Ct. Files Whitchurch, 12 Oct. 1711; Ct. R. Alveston and Tiddington, 11 Apr. 18 Chas. II; Ct. Bk. 20 Apr. 2 Jas. I.

² Warks. R.O., MR. 16/9; Worcs. R.O. Acc. 54, Ct. R. Kempsey, 31 Mar. 1656; WSL, Ct. R. Shenstone, 1 May 9 Chas. I; Northants R.O., Daventry Coll. 532, Hellidon orders, 13 Nov. 1714; 533, do. 20 Oct. 29 Chas. II; SOA, Ct. Bk. Stoneleigh, p. 23.

³ P.R.O., Ct. R., SR, bdle 106, no. 1534, m. 6.

sufficient mound betwixt neighbour and neighbour" (Leamington Hastings, Warks., 1630).¹

These last eight references do not indicate, however, that the balks ploughed up were boundaries between strips, in the sense that they ran longwise between them. Of the Presentments, the following interpretation is equally possible: that they were stintins or half-balks where two furlongs met end to end, with the lands of one furlong abutting direct on to those of the other. The owner of each abutting land had to leave a customary margin unploughed for his neighbour to turn his team on. When the time came to plough these half-balks, one man ploughed too far into his neighbour's margin and was duly presented and fined at the manorial court in consequence.

It is the contention of this article that Dr Kerridge has failed to produce any satisfactory or conclusive evidence of the existence of balks as demarcations *between* strips in the open fields. Such of his evidence, in the form of footnote references, as has been examined, turns out to be in some cases untraceable, in others non-existent, and the rest susceptible of interpretation other than that suggested in his text. He has failed to prove that such demarcations, either in the chalk country or in the midland plain, existed as late as the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. But even had he succeeded, it would be difficult to deduce that such boundaries were common in the Middle Ages. That, surely, is the important point, if we wish to know how the open fields worked at their zenith and not where they merely survived as a remnant.

Obviously there came a time in the history of every open-field parish when a comparatively static phase was reached. Signs that it had been reached would be found, for instance, in the abandonment of the practice of co-aration, in a certain degree of consolidation of strips, and in a change of the method by which land reclamation was effected. Instead of a third large field (in addition to the two already existing) being brought into cultivation, what was reclaimed from the waste was now held, on the margin of the open fields, in severalty. Where there had been much consolidation, there might be a desire to enclose: and this desire might be effected by the use of narrow balks which would at the same time preserve the rights of pasturage over the arable fields. For this reason, the dating of the appearance of balks, if such exist, between strips, is essential if we are to deduce anything relevant to the medieval strip-farming system.

The purpose of this article has been to determine the present position regarding balks as boundary demarcations, to stress the present state of ignorance of the subject and the pitfalls into which we may be led. A far

¹ Warks. R.O., MR. 14.

wider and more profound investigation could be made; and some indication of its extent is to be found in the Appendix. Here are listed a number of places for which evidence, varying in strength, of balks as strip boundaries may be found. In cases where a visit, or some examination of the evidence has been possible, these have been described. Where the information is sufficiently brief it has been quoted in full. Where considerably more has been written on the subject, references only are given.

The two most fruitful lines of investigation, for those who would attempt to establish the use of balks as strip boundaries, would appear to be as follows. Did the one-way plough ever hold sway to any extent in open-field country? If so, when and where? If evidence is forthcoming along these lines, is there any further evidence, in such localities, that balks existed between strips as distinct from all the other kinds of balks which existed in every open-field area? Secondly, there are certain areas where enclosure has never taken place, or incompletely so, and where balks dividing holdings in some sense exist or existed until recently. Did these balks themselves come into existence only recently, or at least in the modern period, as a result of consolidation, and as an attempt to satisfy the desire to enclose while respecting unalienated grazing rights; or are they, in fact, a survival of an ancient form of strip demarcation? The question 'when?' here is all-important. The answers will be found only by a patient and detailed study, such as the Orwins made of Laxton, of the localities in question—of their soil and contours, of their estate maps, terriers, and manorial records, and all other evidence printed, written, and unwritten.

APPENDIX

BEDFORDSHIRE

HINWICK. Orders for Hinwick (in court papers) 29 Oct. 1668. "That every person within the parish afforesaid shall leave a balke att the outsides of his lands betwixt man and man and the said balke to bee a foote and halfe wide under paine of 2s. 6d."—Beds. R.O. OR 809. I am indebted to Miss J. Godber for this reference.

BUCKINGHAMSHIRE

WENDON (*sic*, for WEEDON?). The following statement, made by William, James, and Jacob Malcolm in their *General View of the Agriculture of the County of Buckingham*, London, 1794, p. 29, is quoted by Gilbert Slater (*The English Peasantry and the Enclosure of the Common Fields*, London, 1907, pp. 75, 76) and cited by Dr Kerridge (*A.H.R.*, III, 1955, p. 40, n. 1). "About fourteen years ago the parishioners came to an agreement, and obtained an Act to lay the small pieces of land together. . . When division took place, the balks were of necessity ploughed up, by which a great proportion of the sheep pasture was destroyed." There is no indication that

these balks were strip boundaries. If they were, it is difficult to understand how sheep could be pastured on them. Of their extent, the writers go on to say "the wastes and balks in these common fields occupy a great space of ground, and yield but very little of any kind of produce."

CUMBERLAND

CASTLE CARROCK. Of this parish F. M. Eden, in his *State of the Poor*, London, 1797, II, p. 65, says that it "contains by estimation, 750 acres of cultivated land, 600 acres of cow common, and 1500 acres of mountainous common. . . The greatest part of this parish remains in dales, or doles, as they are called; which are slips of cultivated land belonging to different proprietors, separated from each other by ridges of grass-land: about 100 acres may have been enclosed within the last 50 years." Gilbert Slater quotes part of this passage (*op. cit.* p. 257) substituting, however, the word "strips" for "slips."

WARWICK ON EDEN. F. M. Eden (*ibid.*, p. 92) says: "It consists of 600 acres of common, and 1126 acres of cultivated land. . . There is a small common in the middle of the parish: almost the whole of the cultivated land has been enclosed within the last fifty years. It formerly, although divided, lay in long slips, or narrow dales, separated from each other by ranes, or narrow ridges of land, which are left unploughed. In this manner, a great deal, and perhaps the whole of the cultivated lands in Cumberland, was anciently disposed." Gilbert Slater quotes part of this passage (*ibid.*) substituting, again, "strips" for "slips."

DEVONSHIRE

BRAUNTON. See J. B. Phear, 'Notes on Braunton Great Field', *Trans. Devon. Ass.*, XXI, 1889, p. 202; H. P. R. Finberg, 'The Open Field in Devonshire', *Antiquity*, XXIII, no. 92, Dec. 1949, p. 180; W. G. Hoskins and H. P. R. Finberg, *Devonshire Studies*, London, 1952, pp. 265-71; Orwin, *op. cit.*, pp. 50, 51.

DORSET

GRIMSTON. Extract from Court Roll of the Manor of Grimston, 9 Oct. 1789. "It is agreed that the several tenants of this Manor do meet in the West Field within this Manor on the 14th inst., between 9 and 10 o'clock in the morning, to bound out the several Lands. And after the same shall be so bounded out it is ordered that each Tenant leave a Lanchett of a furrow between his and the adjoining land, under a penalty of 20s. for making a default." See Alfred Pope, 'Some Ancient Customs of the Manors of Stratton and Grimston, Co. Dorset', *Proc. Dorset Nat. Hist. and Ant. Field Club*, XXX, 1909, p. 94.

ISLE OF PORTLAND. See C. D. Drew, 'The Open Arable Fields at Portland and Elsewhere', *Antiquity*, XXII, no. 86, June 1948, p. 79; R. Douch, 'Customs and Traditions of the Isle of Portland', *Antiquity*, XXIII, no. 91, Sept. 1949, p. 14; Orwin, *op. cit.*, p. 50.

GLOUCESTERSHIRE

UPTON ST LEONARDS. Gilbert Slater, in his notes on *Some Recent Enclosures* (*op. cit.*, p. 63), says of this parish: "This enclosure took place at the same time as that of Castor and Ailes-worth, and was completed in 1899. The common field consisted of 1120 strips of arable land, total area 520 acres, and the 'balks' or 'meres' separating the strips were estimated at 14 acres." The date of enclosure was in fact 1895, the date of award or enrolment, 1897, and the acreage involved 516 acres. (W. E. Tate, 'Gloucestershire Enclosure Acts and Awards', *Trans. Bristol and Glos. Arch. Soc.*, LXIV, 1943, p. 63.) It will be seen that the balks constituted barely three per cent of the total acreage. This is a very small proportion if these balks consisted not only of paths, sikes, and possibly headlands, but also of unploughed land between the strips. At Laxton, where there were no balks between strips, "the sikes and other unploughed

ground amounted to about five per cent of the area of the common fields."—Orwin, *op. cit.*, p. 58.

Slater does not say where he obtained his evidence for stating that there were balks between the strips, but it may have been from an article by Canon Scobell who, incidentally, derives some of his interpretations from Seebohm (*art. cit.*, p. 215). In this article Canon Scobell says, "The strips, which thus appear to have existed generally in this and other uninclosed parishes, were separated from each other not by hedges but by lengths of unploughed grass—called 'balks' or 'meers'. . . ." With this article is published a photograph of a balk. Set into the ground, at the near end of the balk, is a meerstone, initialled 'N'. A complete and extended view of the balk is prevented by the figures of a lady and dog who are shown reclining at a distance of some three yards from the camera: further than these two figures, the balk cannot be seen. Mr Charles Green, commenting on this article, says, "The balks themselves have, in the intervening years, been ploughed out of existence as far as I can trace. Merestones, however, can still be found in this parish, in considerable numbers." ('Balks and the Open Field System', *Antiquity*, xxii, no. 88, Dec. 1948.) Although the following information is not given in his article, Mr Green has been so kind as to tell me that none of the merestones he was able to find dates from a period earlier than the eighteenth century: some date from the early, and others even from the late, nineteenth century.

The 1841 Tithe map of Upton St Leonards is of a scale: 3 chains to one inch (Glos. R.O./P3476/SD2/2). All strips and roads shown on it are numbered, and the numbers refer to a schedule. Unnumbered, however, are series of double dotted lines, with a very narrow space between—narrower than that indicating the roads. These appear through the fields where access balks would be expected: but double dotted lines such as these are not shown between the strips. Another map shows parts of the parish in 1780. This is a Survey of Certain Estates belonging to Benjamin Hyett Esquire (Glos. R.O./D.6), on the scale 12 chains to one inch, and shows headlands at the end of strips, but no balks between them. In view of the scale of these maps, however, narrow balks may well have existed without other indication than a single dotted line. Both stones and posts are shown in the Enclosure Award maps, and they are also found in what was part of the open fields (a part called Brimps Field) in the 1884 Ordnance Survey map.

WESTCOTE. On the main road from Burford to Stow-on-the-Wold, and almost equidistant between the two, occurs the parish of Westcote, consisting of two parts, Church Westcote and Nether Westcote. This parish is on the Oxfordshire-Gloucestershire border, its solid geology is Inferior Oolite, and it is situated almost at the junction of stonewall country with that of fences. It has never been enclosed. On the left-hand side of this road may be seen rectangular fields some 30 to 40 yards wide, divided by balks of about the width of one yard. Of this land the Orwins say, "Much of it is divided by grass balks, but most of the parcels are large having the appearance of small fields rather than of strips, and they suggest that there has been a good deal of consolidation at some time, the balks taking the place of hedges and boundary marks."—*Op. cit.*, p. 46. On the other side of the road, however, between it and Church Westcote, are a number of considerably narrower strips—suggestively so. And the 1840 Tithe map shows that a century ago there were rather more of these narrow strips than exist today. One of the strip farmers (Mr Simmonds of Nether Westcote) provided the following information regarding the present position. The balks are called meres, they are "to part the land," and may be ploughed up between holdings when these are owned by the same man. He considered them most economical. They are kept as narrow as possible—2 to 3 feet—and are kept down by burning. Each mere belongs to the strip on the north side of it. Although never grazed, they were, within living memory, mown for hay. Only the fixed mouldboard plough is used, and this makes 'lands'—the strips themselves having each their special field name and no other generic term

to describe them. It would seem important that these balks should be dated, either by documentary or archaeological means. (For the difficulties inherent in the archaeological method, see Collin Bowen, M.A., 'The Problem of Roman Villa Fields', *The Archaeological News Letter*, VI, no. 2, 1955, p. 39.)

HAMPSHIRE

COMPTON. The following extract from a Court Roll, 1525, of Compton, is published by J. S. Drew in *Compton, near Winchester*, Winchester, 1939. "Lawrence Whytman has ploughed up a boundary, viz. a 'land-sherde', between the lord's land and that of Peter Fylpotte; he is ordered to keep it restored in future under pain of 40s."

NORFOLK

FORNCETT ST MARY. A visit to this parish last summer (1955) elicited that 'mere' balks dividing the lands had now gone. The previous owner (Mr Lincoln) of a $\frac{1}{4}$ -acre land said that the mere balks were boundaries, that they had proved useful as a pathway for the plough horses. He said that the fixed mouldboard plough was the only type used, and that with it lands were ploughed, known locally as 'beds'; also that there had been similar mere balks at Wacton.

CAISTER-ON-SEA. Mr Charles Green has described to me balks, in the form of small ridges between lands, under turf, which he noted while excavating the Roman site in 1951. The lands were parallel to the contours on a very slight slope.

HAPTON HOLE. My attention was directed to this district of Hapton, near Norwich, by Mr Charles Green, on the basis of information which he had obtained from Mr R. Rainbird Clarke, Curator of Castle Museum, Norwich. A visit to Hapton Hole last summer (1955) revealed a small field divided into three strips called 'londs' separated by mere balks consisting of grass and weed, and about a yard in width. These londs and their mere balks were not straight-sided rectangles but of the reversed-S shape, suggesting for the one, if not for the other, a certain antiquity. (See S. R. Eyre, 'The Curving Plough-strip and its Historical Implications', *A.H.R.*, III, 1955, pp. 90-4.) Another mere balk was said to exist in a neighbouring field, but this was not inspected.

RUNTON. This parish, near Cromer, is still unenclosed. Gilbert Slater said of it: "There is a tendency for adjoining strips of land to be let to one and the same farmer and he is allowed to plough down the balks, in Runton called *lawns* or *loons*, which separate them."—*Op. cit.*, p. 331. A visit to West Runton last summer (1955) and a few enquiries made on the spot elicited the following information. On one large arable field there are a few balks separating strips. These balks consist of grass, dock, and other weeds, and are supposed to be maintained to the width of one yard. They are called 'mire' balks, not lawns or loons. There used to be mire stones at the end of some of these. One is supposed to be still in position, although now in a hedge, but a rather cursory search for it proved unsuccessful. The strips, straight-edged rectangles, rather than the balks, are called 'londs' (to rhyme with 'ponds'), although the 'd' sometimes fails to be articulated. The londs vary in width: some are 10, some are 20 yards in width, some are an acre, some half an acre in extent. They are made with the fixed mouldboard plough into lands which are also, confusingly, known as 'londs'.

The practice now seems to be contrary to what Slater described, in that if adjoining strips (belonging to different owners) are let to one and the same farmer, he must not plough down the mires. They may disappear only as the strips are consolidated among owners themselves. Since this land has never been enclosed, common grazing rights remain: two flocks of sheep, one after the other, are entitled to graze over the stubble after the harvest has been lifted. There are, in fact, no flocks in Runton and no one knows now who are the commoners: but these

unalienated grazing rights have precluded the erecting of barriers such as hedges or fences. For the information regarding grazing rights I am indebted to Canon F. H. Matthews, rector of Runtun, and for the rest to farm labourers, working in the field, to whom he kindly introduced me.

NOTTINGHAMSHIRE

NEWARK. See M. W. Barley, M.A., F.S.A., 'Documents Relating to the Manor and Soke of Newark-on-Trent', *Thoroton Society, Record Series*, xvi, Nottingham, 1956, Introduction, pp. xlvii-xlviii, and Survey of the Bishop's Demesne, pp. 46-53.

PEMBROKESHIRE

HAVERFORDWEST. H. L. Gray, in his *English Field Systems*, O.U.P., 1915, p. 174, quotes from a note prefixed to the survey of the royal lordship of Haverfordwest, made in 21 James I. "And wee holde it conveynient that for all exchaunges to be made of anie peeces of land betwixte the Tennantes for conveynencie, that the same be made in writinge and presented at the next Courte to the Stewarde to be Recorded, and that Notwithstandinge the exchaunge the auncient landshares and meares betwixt the peeces be preserved."—Land Rev., M. B. 238, f. 37.

PERTHSHIRE (SOUTH)

H. L. Gray (*op. cit.*, p. 165) describing the system known as 'runrig' in southern Perthshire, quotes from James Robertson's *Southern Perth*, 1794, p. 65: "But in our times nothing can be more absurd, than to see two or three, or perhaps four men, yoking their horses together in one plough and having their ridges alternately in the same field, with a bank of unploughed land between them by way of boundary. . . The land is like a piece of striped cloth with banks full of weeds and ridges of corn in constant succession from one end of a field to the other."

RUTLANDSHIRE

NORTH AND SOUTH LUFFENHAM AND BARROWDEN. Gilbert Slater states (*op. cit.*, pp. 64, 65): "The first steps towards the enclosure of these three parishes were made immediately after the passing of the 1876 Act: the Enclosure Act was passed in 1878, and the awards were made in 1881 and 1882. Out of 5480 acres in the three parishes, 4800 were common-field arable, a heath claimed by Barrowden and South Luffenham occupied 390 acres, and much of the remainder was commonable meadow and pasture. . . The report of the Enclosure Commissioners says of Barrowden that the 1240 acres of arable land 'is divided in 2790 strips, some not more than 12 feet wide, each divided from its neighbour by a green balk, which is a nursery of weeds.' Old farmers, however, assured me that the balks were mostly gone before enclosure. Field reeves were elected, and they settled any dispute that arose in consequence of the absence of balks, and individual farmers quickly detected, by pacing across their strips, if a furrow had been appropriated by a neighbour."

WILTSHIRE

VALE OF WARMINSTER. The Rev. Canon Jackson, F.S.A., in his article 'The Vale of Warminster', *Wiltshire Archaeological Magazine*, xvii, 1878, p. 294, stated: "There is, in this country, and there used to be a great deal more, of what is called 'common field', i.e., large tracts of unenclosed arable, held in 'severalty', not unlike our modern Poor Allotments—strips or pieces, held, either by different persons, or, may be, three or four, by one and the same person. The strips are marked off from one another, not by hedge or wall, but by a simple grass path, a foot or so wide, which they call 'balks' or 'meres'."