

Rhosili Open Field and Related South Wales Field Patterns

By MARGARET DAVIES

IN the manor of Rhosili there are two sharply contrasting types of land (Fig. I). The northern half is occupied by Rhosili Down, a rounded mass of Devonian conglomerates and brownstones, partly strewn with boulder clay. The southern half, the land south of Rhosili and Middleton villages, is largely free from glacial drift and is covered with good loams underlain by Carboniferous limestone.

Rhosili Down rises sharply from a shelf of arable land (the drift-covered terrace along Rhosili Bay) to a rock-strewn ridge 600 feet high. Though this ridge falls away more gently eastward, slopes are still steep and Rhosili Down was and is pasture for sheep, horses, and cattle. The main area of the Down has never been enclosed; it is the common land of the manor of Rhosili and, as the remainder of the manor is largely arable, plays a vital part in its agriculture. The southern slopes of Rhosili Down are now enclosed; in the south-east, around Talgarth Well, the fields are small and they are grouped, two or three together, round small scattered houses. These have all the marks of squatters' holdings, encroachments made by stealth on the fringes of the common land. Larger and more regular fields, enclosed by the village farmers, lie behind Rhosili and Middleton villages on the southern slopes of the Down. These two villages, recently joined by a string of roadside houses, are distinct clusters of old farms. Their main arable holdings lie in the peninsula south-west of the villages, and until recently these two farm clusters housed all the tenants of the land there. The former squatters' holdings provided and still provide smallholdings for farm labourers having no share in the better land in the southern half of the manor. Here there are no scattered farms.

On the west and south Rhosili manor is bounded by the sea. An Elizabethan survey of 1598 defines the boundaries shown on Fig. I as "Beginning at a well called Tall-garth-Well and joining to the hedge of Owen Perkin's land called Freeland, and so as that leadeth southward to Elliot's Cross, from thence and crossing the land as the hedge leadeth to a hallar (*sic*) called Stephen's Torrs, and there hence as a stone wall, being a landseare between this Lordship and the lands of Wm. Price Esq., leadeth to a little creek called Newslade, and so westward by the side of the sea to the farthermost or point of Wormshead, being within the Lordship afsd, and so northward by the

side of the sea to the fall of the Dilly-Lake being the landseare between the parish of Langennith and Rosilly.”¹ Fig. I shows the part of the landward boundary of the manor which lies between Mewslade Bay and Hoarstone, a name used in Gower and elsewhere for a manorial boundary mark and subsequently for a field and place name. The “Dilly Lake” is a stream running out into Rhosili Bay beyond the northern end of Rhosili Down. Another part of the survey of 1598 notes that parts of the manor were held separately, and this was so in 1780. Fig. II is based on one of the fine series of maps by John Williams of the estates of Thomas Mansel Talbot of Penrice, which are now deposited in Glamorgan County Record Office. Nearly fifty acres and a farmstead in Rhosili village were owned by the Popkin family of Forest, Llansamlet, in 1780. With the exception of one field owned by William Richard, the remainder was held by Thomas Mansel Talbot as lord of the manor. The manor was part of the lordship of Landymor, and the two parts were sometimes referred to as “Llandimor and Rhosilli, the Greater and the Less.”

The southern, arable half of the manor lies between Rhosili and Middleton villages and the sea. It comprises the snout of land which culminates in the superb broken limestone ridge of Worms Head. The arable land lies on the surface of a plateau which slopes gently south-westward from a height of 275 feet at Rhosili village to 165 feet at the coastguard station on the south-west common, nearly one mile away. The plateau top is thus almost flat. It falls sharply to seaward in limestone cliffs, and these cliffs and the unenclosed cliff tops were and are common grazing land. The cliff top provides a sweeter pasture than Rhosili Down but the southern cliff slopes have much rough bracken and gorse. The cliffs on the north-west side are precipitous. There were also sixteen acres of pasture on Worms Head. In 1845 they were classed, together with Rhosili Down and the cliff pasture, as common land. In 1780 they were let to Matthew Beynon (tenant B: Fig. II) and in 1693 to John Beynon for an annual rent of five shillings.

The arable holdings are separated from the cliff common by walls built of stone dug on the spot; the cliff top is pitted with shallow holes at the base of these walls. Within the enclosure walls the arable holdings are arranged in a pattern which is now unfamiliar but was formerly characteristic of the southern lowland fringe of South Wales. This land within the walls forms Rhosili Open Field, locally known as the Vile.² Here open-field cultivation

¹ *Archaeologia Cambrensis*, suppl. vol. 1864, p. 160.

² The word *vile* is probably derived from O.E. *gefilde*: a field or plain. Ekwall cites this as the source of the Lancashire Fylde (‘The File *pro* Feild—1586) in *The Place Names of Lancashire*, 1922, p. 139. Mr Gwynedd O. Pierce, who also suggested this derivation, adds that the

survives today with the holdings only very slightly different from those shown on Figs. I and II.

THE OPEN FIELD IN 1780

The Vile is laid out in long narrow strips which average one and a half acres in area. The marginal strips were and are enclosed within limestone walls near the cliffs and with earth banks topped by thorn hedges near the villages. These enclosed fields were sometimes meadow or pasture land in 1780 as they are today, and those which border the village farms have probably always been closes used for pasturing young stock and milch cows. Within the peripheral belt of enclosed strips the Vile was and is arable land and there are no fences between the strips tenanted by various farmers. The dividing line between the strips is a low narrow balk known as a landshare, a word widely used to denote a boundary in south-west Britain, e.g. in Pembrokeshire the Landsker separates the northern area of predominantly Welsh from the southern one with mainly English speech. Landsear is used for 'boundary' in the Elizabethan survey already quoted and landshares or balks are further discussed below. Strips tenanted by the Rhosili and Middleton farmers were and are widely scattered over the Vile. Fig. I shows that groups of strips have distinctive names and that a holding is made up of strips distributed over these different segments of the open field. These names, which often provide clues to soil conditions ('Stonyland' marks the southern limit of glacial drift) are still used. Strips held by one tenant rarely adjoined each other in 1780, except in the extreme south where the two adjoining patches tenanted by George Thomas probably represent an encroachment on the cliff common.

In 1780 the six farmers of Rhosili village (B-H on Fig. II) held nearly 142 acres in the Vile and in closes of meadow around their farms. It will be noticed that several holdings, here and at Middleton, were of about nineteen acres and that Matthew Beynon's holding was considerably above the average. The seven farmers of Middleton (I-P) held nearly 130 acres in the Vile and, to a greater degree than those of Rhosili, in enclosed fields sloping up to Rhosili Down and gently down towards Mewslade Bay. Many of the Middleton farmers held only one or two strips in the Vile; the larger share of open

voicing of the initial *F* to *V*, a common feature of the dialects of south-west England and the south-west Midlands, has influenced field and place-names in the Vale of Glamorgan. Similar field-names occur in Gower, and Furzylands is pronounced Verzylands at Rhosili. Both Gower and the Vale of Glamorgan have received peoples from lands around and across the Bristol Channel for many centuries and a large proportion of their field-names are English. A Welsh derivation for *vile* is unlikely.

arable land was therefore held, and was probably always held, by the farmers of the older group of farms around the parish church of Rhosili. Many of the holdings are small, not by Welsh standards generally, but, say, in comparison with the larger farms of the Vale of Glamorgan. But it must be remembered that 900 acres of Rhosili Down and a further eighty-two acres of cliff common were available for the communal grazing of the animals of both villages.

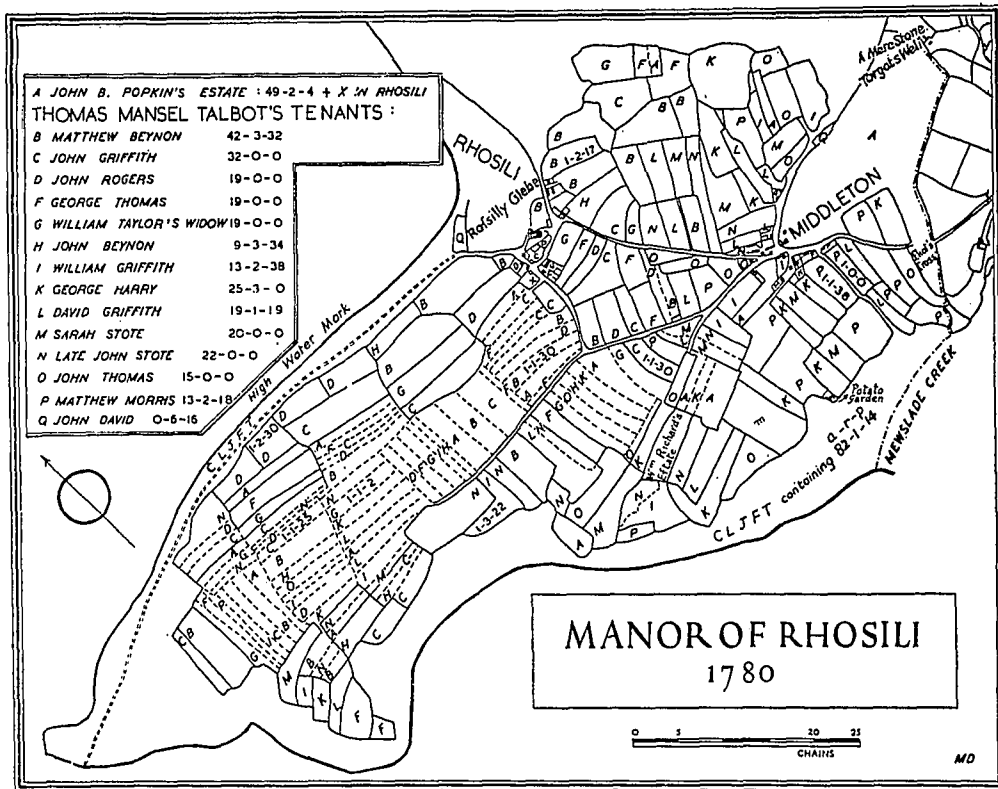


FIG. II

Rhosili Manor in 1780. The coastline and 'cliffs' are shown as on John Williams's map of 1780.

There are no common meadows such as Llanbethery Moor, in the Thaw valley, which is still communally grazed in the summer half-year. No similar flat-bottomed valley exists in Rhosili manor or elsewhere along the south coast of Gower. The Bishopston valley is a possible exception and the cattle of several farmers may once have grazed in meadows there (Fig. III).

An annual redistribution of strips was unknown at Rhosili. The strips shown in Fig. II were tenanted as part of a holding year after year. They were handed over when holdings changed tenants, as did that of John Griffith (Fig. II, c). Between 1780 and 1845 this was added to the holding of the Thomas family and the strips which made up the fifty-one acres held

in 1845 by Robert Thomas are held by that family today. Extensions of holdings could be made only into the common pasture. By 1780 this had been done upslope on the south face of Rhosili Down, probably to the limit of cultivation on this exposed slope. A small encroachment on the cliff common is the "potato garden" tenanted by Sarah Stote. Potato patches were often enclosed in this way in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries on the margins of fields and roads. Sarah Stote held Broad Cliff (m) in addition to her twenty-acre holding and its distinctive classification suggests that it had been enlarged by encroachment. By 1845 it had been joined to the potato garden by another enclosure.

RHOSILI MANOR IN 1845

Fig. I shows the old parsonage and its glebe lands on the shelf of drift-covered land below Rhosili Down. A terrier of 1720¹ describes the parsonage as having two rooms and lofts (it was declared unfit for habitation a century later), a barn and three outhouses, and a small croft on the north side of the house. This croft is the 'burgage' of Fig. I; the name is frequently used for such closes as far west as south Pembrokeshire. The parsonage had eight tillable fields in 1720, totalling twenty acres, and six acres of warren. The rectory now stands in Rhosili village, but the former parsonage and its well-kept fields are still a distinctive feature of the land fronting Rhosili Bay. Glebe land lying apart from the open-field system is a common feature and may be seen in other parts of Gower—e.g. at Bishopston (see below).

Fig. I is based on the tithe map and award of 1845. Holdings in the Vile, and more especially those of the Rhosili farmers, are only slightly different from those of 1780. For this reason only one open-field holding has been shown. The farm clusters have not been enlarged, and in 1845, and today, the houses and land are mainly occupied by the descendants of the farmers of 1780. Christopher Rice Mansel Talbot of Penrice was lord of the manor in 1845. A comparison of Figs. I and II reveals very minor changes in the open field and in the enclosed fields east of it which lie on the margin of the Mewslade valley. Up this valley, on the north side of Pitton village, was the only suitable point for a mill to grind the locally produced corn. There was no mill in the manor of Rhosili, where there are no considerable surface streams. North of Pitton Mill squatters' holdings can be seen on both sides of the manor boundary. An unusually large one, that of Francis Jones, is shaded on Fig. I. These squatters' holdings were more frequently of two fields like that named Sorry Bargain. All this south-eastern fringe of Rhosili Down is a poorly drained area of rough grazing.

¹ J. D. Davies, *West Gower*, Swansea, 1885, III, p. 169.

PRESENT-DAY CONDITIONS

Fig. I shows two lanes leading into the open fields. They are deep and narrow and just wide enough for a tractor. The main hedged lane from Middleton to Limestone Hills is now disused along Sandy Land and Cooks, and the only way for modern agricultural vehicles down to the Vile from Middleton is along the motor road to Rhosili and thence down the lane through Priest Hay to Middle Field. A number of unfenced ways run along several of the groups of strips and there are paths out to the cliff top whence grazing sheep can be inspected. The tenants of Rhosili manor have, in recent years, bought their holdings from the Penrice Estate, but there is as yet little rearrangement of the pattern of strips. Holdings are widely scattered, and some time may elapse before considerable amalgamations occur. During the latter half of the nineteenth century further strips near Rhosili village were enclosed within walls and hedges. Those grouped on Fig. I under the names Sandyland, Furzyland, Mead, and Nellin became hedged strips with the hedges running on top of the earthen balks. Many of them reverted to pasture in the nineteenth century and a few have not been ploughed again. Cattle graze there and on the enclosed fields near the cliffs. 'Cooks' remains as a small isolated group of strips and is known as the Little Vile. A wire fence has recently been run through the centre of it on top of one of the balks. In the main Vile a few balks have been ploughed out and an occasional light fence has been run along the side of a lane over the open field. The only permanent structure in the area is a light shed built by the tenant of the pasture at Sound Park. The homes of those who work the land remain in the villages some distance away.

This south-western extremity of Gower is exposed to strong sea winds, and hedges and shelter belts might appear to be far more suitable than low balks one to two feet high as protection for crops. But long experience has shown that the winds dry the corn, and in the boisterous late summer of 1954 it was far less badly laid than in enclosed fields further inland in Gower where the hedges had acted as a funnel for wind gusts. Low balks are also more economical divisions of land and do not shade the crops as do high earth banks topped with thorn hedges leaning away from the west winds.

Are these narrow one-and-a-half acre strips likely to survive? Their distinction has caused them to be marked on the 2½-inch map (Sheet 21/48) as "allotment gardens," and they are in fact as carefully cultivated as many market gardens. The old manor of Rhosili and the former fee of Pitton now produce large quantities of spring cabbage: mild springs make early crops a profitable undertaking, as in south Pembrokeshire. Potatoes, cereal crops, rape, and rotation grasses like lucerne and sainfoin are also grown. The

flatness of the plateau top made it possible to lay out straight-sided strips and these are far more convenient for tractor ploughing than strips which curve with the swing of the land. In other parts of Gower where such curved strips, often of one acre or less, have been enclosed, tractors get into more difficulties than the ox ploughs for which these strips were originally designed (see below). The narrowness of the Rhosili strips appears to present no problems, and a few strips are even subdivided along their length; for example, a few furrows may be sown with barley and the rest with potatoes.

In medieval open-field agriculture cattle were turned into the stubble after harvest and grazed in common as they still do in the open fields of Laugharne across Carmarthen Bay. This practice is not remembered at Rhosili, though the older farmers used to graze their cattle on their own stubbles in the open fields and herd them individually, as does a French farmer in the open plains of Beauce today. Periodic grazing has now wholly lapsed on Rhosili Vile.

The Vile is the mainstay of Rhosili and Middleton villages and is in a good state of intensive cultivation. The small local tourist industry and agriculture hardly impinge upon each other, but together they make for greater local prosperity than in the nineteenth century.¹

OPEN FIELDS IN GOWER AND OTHER PARTS OF SOUTH WALES

Many surveys of open-field agriculture exclude or dismiss the Welsh evidence. The system was best developed in the English midlands and spread westward during the Anglo-Norman occupation of South Wales. "The saied Lords marchers being Englishe lords . . . brought the most parte of the landes of the saied Lordships to be of English tenure."² It is likely that fields were communally tilled by Welsh tribal units in South as in North Wales before the Norman Conquest, but the open-field patterns and nomenclature which survived until recently in many South Wales areas are essentially English. Vestiges of open-field farming can be found in documents,³ in estate and tithe maps, and on the ground at the present day in all South Welsh counties from Monmouthshire westward and northward to Cardiganshire. It

¹ In 1833 when the lord of the manor gave up his right to 'wreck de mer' it was hoped that "the neighbourhood, which is very poor, will be considerably benefited by this occurrence." Up to the early nineteenth century smuggling was a minor local occupation. In 1801 George Beynon, Customs Officer, seized a cargo of 108 eight-gallon casks of brandy, 'Geneva', rum, and wine.

² George Owen in 1603. See *The Description of Penbrokeshire*, ed. Henry Owen, Part III, 1906, p. 144.

³ The documentary evidence was first collected and presented in detail by William Rees in *South Wales and the March*, Oxford, 1924.

is in the coastal lowlands and in the main valleys, where English influences were strongest, and fairly flat land most abundant, that the manorial system was established and persisted. The homesteads are grouped in nucleated villages as in the English plain, and not scattered over the countryside as they are in the pastoral uplands of Wales.¹

As might be expected, the south Monmouthshire open fields, nearest the present border, were most akin to those of the English midlands. Undy, Magor, Redwick, and Caldicot had large areas of open arable and meadow land (sometimes described as Furlongs) which were enclosed as late as 1850–8.² Some of their common pastures are still unenclosed. In Caldicot parish 225 acres lay in intermixed strips of arable or meadow until 1858. Most of them lay in the Great Field which bordered the north side of the village.³ Open arable and meadow land survived on the outskirts of Monmouth borough until the mid-nineteenth century and was also found on the margins of the middle Usk valley. By its estuary The Marshes, on the north side of Newport, was the common meadow of the burgesses.⁴ Open-field farming was a feature of the Vale of Glamorgan where it is widely attested in documents and maps throughout the area between the common meadows of Cardiff, on the eastern, and those of Baglan on the western margin. A large common meadow is still in use on Llanbethery Moor in the Thaw valley. It is similar to meadows in the adjoining manor of Llancadle which were formerly cropped for hay by individual farmers and then grazed in common by their cattle. These lammas meadows are on the flat bottom of the valley of the Kenson River, a tributary of the Thaw. On Llanbethery Moor holdings are substantially the same today as they were when the tithe commissioners surveyed the area in 1840 and drew up the tithe award for the parish (Llancarfan). Stinting of cattle grazing on the moor is determined according to the size of the holding at a spring meeting of the farmers involved. Open arable fields in many parts of the Vale of Glamorgan and Gower were small. The deep valleys which trench the coast plateaux in both areas often leave only narrow blocks of plateau top available for ploughing. This was the case

¹ "Their buildings are Englishe like, in Townreddes and villages and not in severall and lone houses."—George Owen, *op. cit.*, Part 1, 1892, p. 33.

² These four parishes are included in the distribution map in the first edition of C. S. and C. S. Orwin, *The Open Fields*, Oxford, 1938, p. 65, as the only Welsh open-field areas.

³ This was formerly the West Field. See William Rees, *A Survey of the Duchy of Lancaster Lordships in Wales, 1609–1613*, Cardiff, 1953, pp. 135 ff.

⁴ Hay from this common meadow was sold by auction until the nineteenth century and the aftermath was grazed in common. Profits from hay sales were divided among the resident burgesses: the last payment from this fund was made in 1924. See David Williams, *John Frost: A Study in Chartism*, Cardiff, 1939, pp. 28–9.

around Llancadle village between the steep-sided Kenson and Thaw valleys, and in other parts of Llancarfan parish.

The manors of the Gower peninsula provided several examples of small open fields until the nineteenth century, but with the exception of Rhosili Vile all are now enclosed. Occasionally the balk which separated two strips can still be found, topped by a wire fence, e.g. in Broad Acre, south of Pyle Cross at Bishopston (Fig. III). The extensive common pastures of Gower have resisted enclosure to a remarkable degree, and Port Eynon Moor, en-

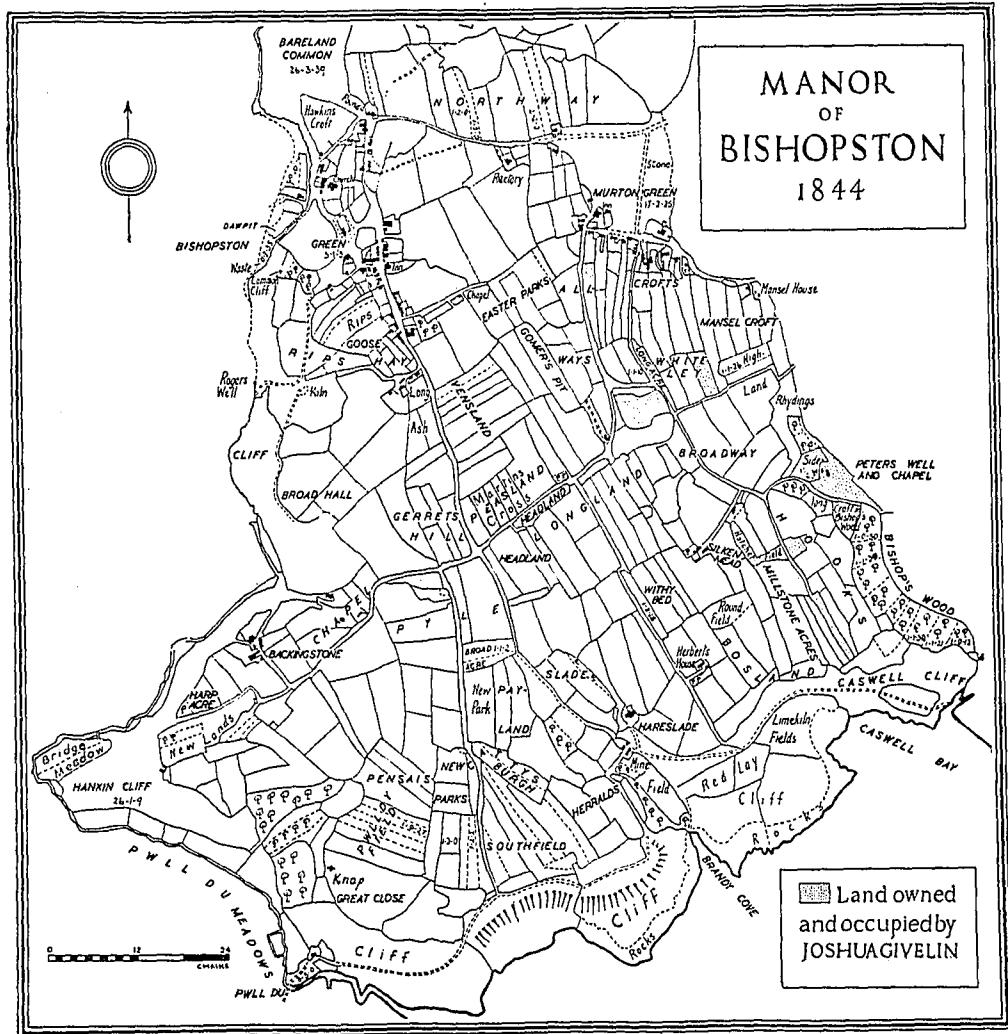


FIG. III

The Manor of Bishopston in 1844. This map is based on the tithe map of the parish. In the southern part of the manor, shown here, parish and manor boundaries coincide. The 'dawpit' west of Bishopston village is a sinkhole in the bottom of the limestone valley.

closed in the early seventeenth century, is the only considerable common which has been converted to hedged arable fields and meadows in recent centuries. Boundaries of commons and rights of grazing and of quarrying (of limestones on cliff commons and millstones on sandstone commons like Cefn Bryn and Rhosili Down) were always clearly defined in manorial surveys.¹

The tithe map and award of 1844 for Ilston parish show "Lithered" (Llethrid) Meadow between Pengwern Common and the stream which drains Welsh Moor and drops underground in the limestones of Parc le Breos Cwm, south of Llethrid. The outer shares in Llethrid Meadow were enclosed by the early nineteenth century, but two groups of unfenced strips (described as landshares) lay within them. The strips varied from half to one and a half acres in the northern to two and a half to seven acres in the central block of strips. Llethrid Meadow may well have been the remnant of a lammas meadow similar to the Lord's Meadows granted to the burgesses of Swansea by the de Breos charter of 1305-6.

Fig. III, based on the tithe map and award for Bishopston, shows typical examples of former field patterns in Gower which are by no means wholly obliterated. The limestone coast plateau is trenched here by the two bordering valleys and by that which meets the sea at Brandy Cove. In 1844 the flat tops of the segments between the valleys were laid out in narrow arable strips. Many strips had already been hedged and these hedges have since been partly removed to form normal fields. But several strips of approximately one acre are still being cultivated today. Fig. III shows the two villages of Bishopston and Murton, in which the older farms are grouped, and their small adjoining commons where cattle, sheep, ponies, and geese graze today. The sea cliffs and Hankin Cliff (above the Bishopston Valley) were also common pastures. The larger fields between Bishopston village and the Rectory were glebe lands farmed by the rector. The windswept Bishop's Wood behind Caswell Bay was occupied by nine farmers (one had two shares). Each share included just over an acre of woodland which may have provided very rough pasture or, possibly, timber for 'housebote and heybote' as in medieval times. The field names given in the 1673-5 survey of the manor of Bishopston² all appear on Fig. III and the descendants of many of the

¹ See, e.g., *Archaeologia Cambrensis*, suppl. vols. 1861, 1864, 1870. Many unpublished manuscripts provide earlier and later details. Among the latter is the largely unpublished *Survey of the Seignories of Gower and Kilvey with the several members of which the Most Noble Henry Duke of Beaufort is Lord*. This survey, which is partly based on earlier material, was made in 1764 by Gabriel Powell of Gellihir, steward to the duke of Beaufort. It is in the library of the Royal Institution of South Wales at Swansea.

² *Archaeologia Cambrensis*, suppl. vol. 1864, pp. 143 ff.

seventeenth-century farmers were still holding land there as at Rhosili and elsewhere.

Across Caswell Bay groups of strip fields are found in the adjoining manor of Oystermouth. The best examples are around Langland and Newton villages, and although much arable land is being built over here, the field pattern is still discernible. The narrow lanes show the right-angle bends and frequent changes of direction characteristic of cart tracks which formerly bordered the margins of open fields. A typical example is the disused lane which formerly ran from Newton northwards through the open field and out to Clyne Common, the common pasture of Oystermouth manor. The unfenced tracks which run alongside the groups of strips in Rhosili Vile change direction just as frequently.

Similar field patterns existed in the nineteenth century at Lunnon where the arable land above Parkmill gorge lay in ten unfenced strips described by the tithe commissioners as landshares. They were of half to three acres and together formed Lunnon Great Field. On the north side of the group of farms which form Lunnon village the High Grove field lay in thirteen strips. Between the Great Field and High Grove lay Middle Field and Coity Ditch, similarly subdivided. At Reynoldston holdings were again scattered, though the fields were largely enclosed (Fig. IV). The Lucas family had replaced their roadside farm of Stout Hall by a mansion with the same name which they had built in the adjoining field. They had laid out a park around it in what may well have been a large common field south of Reynoldston village. The tithe map of 1838 shows that a considerable acreage in this park, made up of unfenced landshares, was owned by C. R. Mansel Talbot of Penrice. Along the stream which forms the southern boundary of Reynoldston parish and manor, the meadows were in a few cases still laid out in unfenced strips. Further south in Gower, between the farm clusters of Port Eynon and Overton, there was a Middle Field in eight unfenced acre strips in 1844 and the adjoining fields of Hill Land and Boarland included several fenced strips grouped under these names. The meadow at the bottom of Horton Cliff (common pasture adjoining the village behind the dunes) lay in six strips which the tithemen called landshare pieces. These meadow strips were valuable because this type of lush meadow was rare around Horton, and they were occupied by several tenants.

In the north of Gower there are more examples of arable strip fields and scattered holdings. From medieval times onwards the beasts of the northern farmers had access not only to Cefn Bryn and other large hill commons, but also to the vast salt marshes which fringe the south side of the Burry River estuary. In 1847 Llanrhidian village, and Leason west of it, were flanked by

Marsh at its foot. By 1844, when the tithe commissioners surveyed this parish, the Marsh had been enclosed, but the meadows and withy-bed on its eastern side were described as "in landshares" and were partly unfenced. South of Broughton, in the north of the manor, a field called Longstone was still in four landshares, and one east of Broughton, called Landshare by the tithemen, was in six. Holdings of the farmers of Broughton and Llangennith settlements were scattered throughout the cultivable area. Llanmadoc Down backed the bigger cluster of farms at Llangennith and provided an extensive common pasture. The large hill and dune commons of the parish of Llangennith are described in the tithe award as Lord's Waste. In most awards this older form is not used by the tithemen to describe common land.

In south Carmarthenshire three open fields with a total area of about 300 acres survive at Laugharne. Here they have been in continuous use since the early fourteenth century when Guy de Brian granted the land to the burgesses of Laugharne.¹ South Pembrokeshire and the St David's peninsula were formerly open or 'champion' country and many strips of arable land were enclosed only in the nineteenth century. The *Description of Pembrokeshire* by George Owen of Henllys, lord of Kemes, contains many references to fields and farming in sixteenth-century Pembrokeshire, "a champion and plaine countrie" in which he estimated that 3,000 young people were employed in herding because of the lack of enclosures.² Tithe and estate maps show many strip fields in the Englishries of such manors as Fishguard and Newport, and further south in the manors on both sides of Milford Haven. On its north side the villagers of Houghton in 1840 farmed open fields which included an Oxland. In the Pembrokeshire lowlands a bovat or oxland measured eight acres, and this is the total area of the strips which made up the Houghton oxland. The bishop of St David's was lord of several Pembrokeshire manors and it was noted in 1802 that bishops could not be expected to pay their portion of the expenses of obtaining an enclosure act and of enclosing the 30,000 acres of common and waste land in the diocese.³ Enclosure of this great area could hardly be completed during the tenure of the bishop who initiated enclosure, nor would he reap its reputed benefits.

There was a good deal of church land intermixed with lay holdings in other areas where open fields survived to a late date, e.g. in south Monmouthshire, and the name of a Cardiganshire open field which is still in use is suggestive. This is Morfa Esgob (The Bishop's Moor), on the raised beach

¹ Margaret Davies, *Geography*, XL, 1955, pp. 169-77.

² George Owen, *op. cit.*, pp. 42 and 146-7.

³ John Clark, *Report to the Bishop of St David's*, 20 June 1802 (a privately printed letter now lodged in the Nat. Library of Wales).

between Llan-non and Cardigan Bay. These coastal shelves of Cardiganshire are valuable arable land and were formerly famous for their malt barley crops.¹ A part of the raised beach which adjoins Morfa Esgob now produces

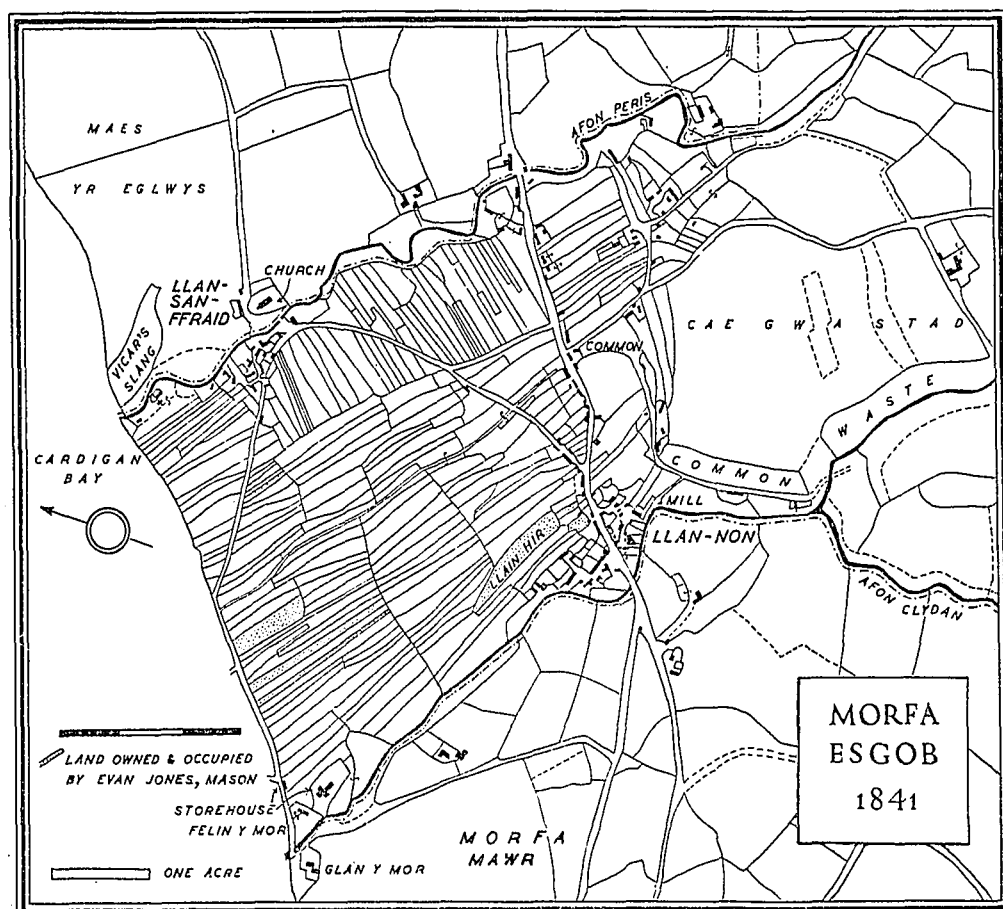


FIG. V

Morfa Esgob in 1841. This open field lies in the parish of Llansanffraid, but the other bordering village, Llan-non, housed the greater number of the men who farmed it. Llan-non is better placed than Llansanffraid as a road and fair centre. Fig. V is based on the tithe map which does not adopt the normal practice of showing unfenced strips bordered by broken lines. The strips of Morfa Esgob were fenced only round the villages and are largely demarcated by broken lines on Ordnance Survey maps made later in the nineteenth century. As there is no contemporary Ordnance Survey map, fenced and unfenced strips have not been distinguished on this map showing conditions in 1841. Morfa Mawr, a large holding off the south of the map, was formerly a grange of Strata Florida Abbey. Vestiges of similar strip fields are found on other parts of the Cardiganshire raised beach, e.g. around Llanddewi Aberarth village. The scale represents 15 chains.

¹ Much of this Cardiganshire raised beach lay in intermixed quillies. See Thomas Lloyd and the Rev. Mr Turnor, *General View of the Agriculture of the County of Cardigan*, 1794, p. 13.

large yields of Aberystwyth pedigree grass seeds. Morfa Esgob has been owned and farmed for several generations by the villagers of Llan-non and Llansanffraid which border it. Here a large number of small narrow strips produce good crops, though around the villages the strips have reverted to pasture and increasing numbers are being enclosed in wire fences run along the balks. Fig. V shows a typical holding. The villagers had only a few strips each and would combine their farming with a trade, as did Evan Jones who was a mason. Smallholdings farmed in this way are still widespread in rural Wales, though examples like the quarrymen's smallholdings of Caernarvonshire are strikingly different in lay-out from those of Morfa Esgob.

BALKS OR LANDSHARES

The surviving South Wales open fields—at Rhosili, Laugharne, and Llan-non—vary as to terrain, crops, and communal grazing of cattle on stubbles (practised only at Laugharne), but all are on relatively light soils and in all of them the strips are separated by low balks which are known at Rhosili and Laugharne as landshares, landscars, or landskers.¹ These must not be furrowed by the plough or disturbed in any way. In 1620 some tenants in the lordship of Haverfordwest, in exchanging their strips so that they might be more conveniently worked, had broken the intervening landshares. An “amendment” was “straightly required,” and whilst exchange of pieces to facilitate enclosure was not condemned, it was suggested that “notwithstandinge the exchange the ancient landseares and meares betwixt the pieces be preserved.”² A Nicholaston (Gower) jury's comment in 1632 also appears to refer to the preservation of these balks: “no landshare hath been altered or removed out of his place, to our knowledge, within the saide mannor.” Markers on the manor boundary are described specifically as “landshare stones” in this survey.³ When they are ploughed out, as was a Rhosili landshare in 1954, the earth and small field stones of which they are composed are soon scattered and very few traces survive a few seasons' ploughing.

Low balks known by some variant of the name ‘landshare’ are characteristic of former open-field areas in south-west England and it has been suggested that they were found where the open fields lay on relatively light

¹ Landshare and landscore fields were also found in Devonshire where Braunton Great Field has balks. See H. P. R. Finberg, ‘The Open Field in Devon’ in *Devonshire Studies*, 1952, pp. 266, 276–8. In the open fields of the Isle of Portland the balks are known as ‘lawnsbeds’. See C. H. Drew, *Antiquity*, xxii, 1948, p. 79.

² P.R.O., Land Revenue Books, 2/206, ff. 1–4.

³ *Archaeologia Cambrensis*, suppl. vol. 1864, p. 225.

soils, e.g. in the chalk lands of Wessex.¹ The surviving South Wales examples support this. It has been argued that balks were a feature of open-field areas where conditions were unique,² but the evidence for their existence in widely separated areas continues to accumulate. Although they cannot now be detected in enclosed fields on the ground, they appear to have been widespread in South Wales. The term 'landshare' was used by the tithe commissioners for parts of South Welsh open fields, though they assumed that it described the strip—'a share of land'—and not the balk. Eighteenth-century estate maps also show groups of strips jointly named "landshare fields." In the seventeenth-century manorial surveys of Fonmon, Penmark, and Lllancadle (Vale of Glamorgan), unfenced strips which the tithemen called landshares in 1840 are referred to as "lancets" and "landsetts." In the manors of the Wiltshire chalklands the balks were lynchets and lynchards.³

In much of the English midlands ridge and furrow has been correlated with open fields.⁴ Others have argued that drainage of wet clay lands rather than land division was the controlling factor there.⁵ The only surviving open field in South Wales known to the writer to be in ridge and furrow is the Lees at Laugharne which is a wet pasture on the fringe of Laugharne Marsh.⁶ In South Wales large enclosed estates were being ridged and furrowed by improving landlords well into the nineteenth century,⁷ and the practice has left its traces on hillsides where the English system was never imposed.

The theory of the curving plough strip formulated by Dr Eyre⁸ is not valid in South Wales. As he states, such strips enable the team to turn more easily into the headland, but to equate our groups of curving strips with ridge and furrow is difficult as the open fields of South Wales are, and probably were, in flat strips divided by balks. All that can safely be said of our widely distributed curved strips is that in the open arable fields curvature often increases with gradient and with the swell of the slope. This is noticeable in the upper parts of Rhosili Vile (in Cooks and Furzyland—Fig. II) and at Laugharne on the steeper eastern slopes of the Hugdon.⁹ Two miles

¹ Eric Kerridge, *Economic History Review*, 2nd series, IV, 1951, p. 19, and *Agricultural History Review*, III, 1955, pp. 32-40.

² C. S. and C. S. Orwin, *op. cit.*, 1954, pp. 49-50. ³ Eric Kerridge, *op. cit.*, 1955, p. 35.

⁴ M. W. Beresford, *Economic History Review*, 2nd series, II, 1949-50, pp. 34-45; W. R. Mead, *Geographical Journal*, CXX, 1954, pp. 34-42.

⁵ Eric Kerridge, *op. cit.*, 1951, pp. 14-36. ⁶ Margaret Davies, *op. cit.*, fig. 4, p. 175.

⁷ Their methods of ploughing ridges and intervening 'reens' with ox teams are given in some detail in Walter Davies, *General View of the Agriculture and Domestic Economy of South Wales*, 1815, I, pp. 287-9. These ridges were usually narrow and of no great height.

⁸ S. R. Eyre, *Agricultural History Review*, III, 1955, pp. 80-94.

⁹ Margaret Davies, *op. cit.*, fig. 2, p. 173.

east of Brecon there was a good group of curved strips at nearly 1,000 feet near Llechfaen on the southward-facing slopes of the Usk valley.¹

Neither in medieval nor later times were plough teams necessarily of "eight or more oxen yoked in pairs." Four oxen were most common in Wales, but there were many combinations, and the Welsh Laws mention yokes of three, six, nine, and twelve feet for the yoking abreast of two, four, six, or eight of the small oxen of the Dark Ages and medieval times.² Mr Payne suggests that "yoked abreast, four or six oxen require no more headland space to turn than two oxen do." He believes that eight or six were yoked abreast until the twelfth century, and four abreast until the end of the fifteenth century when the long team was adopted throughout Wales.³ Dr Eyre's theory hinges on the obsolescence of the long team in early Tudor times.

Dr Eyre asks us to seek curving plough strips grouped *en échelon* as evidence of medieval ploughing. In South Wales we find some of the best examples lying on a sward through which, before completion of ploughing in the manner of his Fig. IV A, the ox team would have floundered heavily to make a landfall on the headland. These groups of curved strips lay in very wet common meadows—e.g. by the mills of the bishop of St David's at Llanwnda (Pembrokeshire) and Llangyfelach (Glamorgan); at Tenby, and at Baglan near Neath; and above all in common meadows behind the sea wall in south Monmouthshire such as the Bees Ditch in the manor of Caldicot and the Hencroft in the manor of Undy.⁴

The open field of Rhosili, spread across a large and formerly remote promontory thrust into the Bristol Channel, would seem to provide evidence for the survival in Wales of a method of farming which is believed by some English authorities to have reached the limit of its westward spread in the Welsh Marches. The strips and landshares of Rhosili suggest, with other Welsh examples, that the lay-out of the strips varied as greatly as did physical conditions in the areas to which the system spread. The balks appear to be similar to those of south-west England, and provide one more link in the bonds of custom and culture which have joined the Bristol Channel shores since prehistoric times.

¹ *A Book of Survey of the Estates of the Hon. George Venables Vernon*, 1776, DDBF, Glamorgan County Record Office.

² F. G. Payne, *Yr Aradr Gymreig*, Cardiff, 1954, pp. 147 and 159.

³ F. G. Payne, *Archaeological Journal*, CIV, 1948, p. 860 and *op. cit.*, 1954, pp. 164-71.

⁴ The farmers of the Monmouthshire "Moors" maintain their excellent fattening pastures in ridges and furrows to solve their major problem of drainage into the major reens and thence into the sea. It might be more appropriate to say that these meadows lie in ridge and drain. The local description would be "ridge and reen."