

The Sheep-Corn Husbandry of Norfolk in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries

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I

DURING the later seventeenth century and throughout the eighteenth, new methods of husbandry were gradually established in Norfolk. The new 'Norfolk Husbandry', developed above all in the north-west of the county, involved crops, rotations, methods of stock feeding, and conditions of land tenure which greatly improved upon earlier practices. In the eighteenth century, Townshend, Coke, L'Estrange, and Walpole were prominent in the systematic development of the new husbandry, but it should be remembered that the various individual practices were being gradually introduced by a multitude of small farmers long before the big estate owners achieved their fame. The object of this paper is to describe the older system which was to be transformed into the new 'Norfolk Husbandry' by the enclosure of open arable fields and commons.

If the Broads and Fens are excluded, an open-field, sheep-corn husbandry can be discerned over about two-thirds of the county in the later Middle Ages and the sixteenth century. The other third, distinguished on Fig. I, may appropriately be called the Wood-Pasture Region with its heavier and inherently more fertile soils. The contrast was well appreciated in the past: one seventeenth-century writer noted that the county "is compownded and sorted of soyles apte for grayne and sheepe, and of soyles apt for woode and pasture."¹ In the area of grain and sheep, with which this paper is principally concerned, the soils were light or medium in character and their sandiness made them relatively (and sometimes absolutely) infertile. Before the eighteenth-century developments in systematic marling and new crops, the sheep and their dung were indispensable for arable cultivation, and with their aid the area was famed for its barley.

As the map shows, the Sheep-Corn Region extended in an arc from south-west to north-east Norfolk. In the south-west the soils of Breckland deteriorate to shallow, wind-blown sands which are still regarded as sub-marginal for cultivation, but the sandy soils in west and north-west Norfolk were sufficiently superior for Arthur Young to christen this the "Good Sand

¹ Norwich Public Library (= N.P.L.), MS. 2641 (undated, seventeenth century).

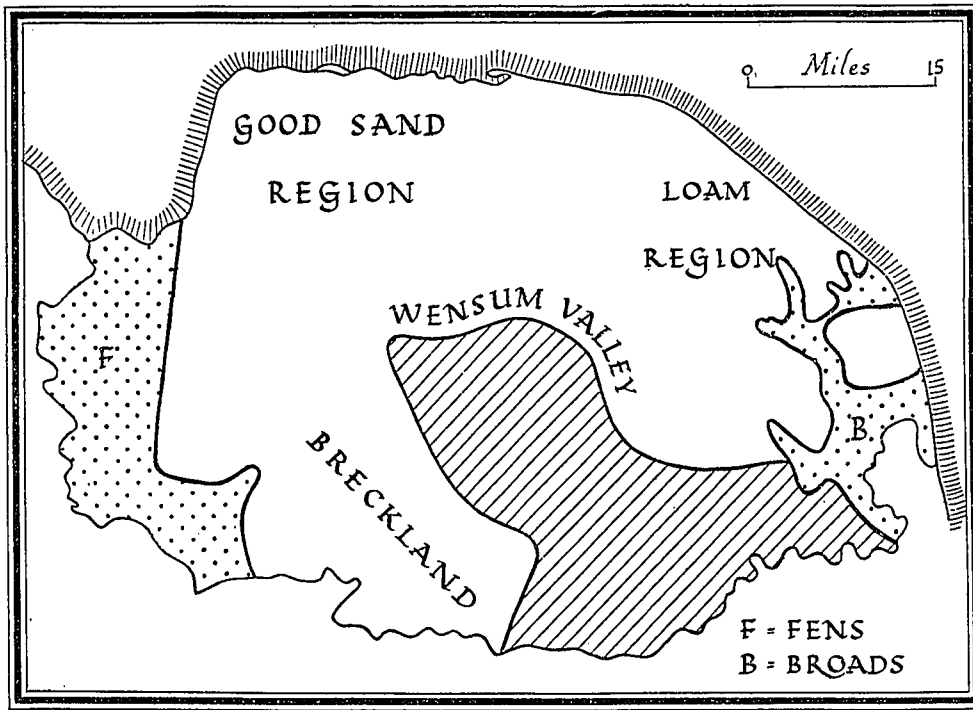


FIG. I

Extent of the Sheep-Corn Region and the Wood-Pasture Region .

Region." Yet until the improvements of the eighteenth century, Good Sand and Breckland formed one single land-use region. Three other districts lay within the Sheep-Corn Region: the sands of the morainic Holt-Cromer Ridge; the broad belt of valley sands and gravels along the Wensum Valley; and scattered patches of light and sandy soils within the Loam Region of north-east Norfolk.

The Sheep-Corn Region was a country of extensive open arable fields and equally extensive heaths and commons. Only limited enclosure of open-field land had taken place there before the seventeenth century, and both landlords and tenants enjoyed all-important common rights over the fields and heaths. With large flocks of sheep to dung, or "tathe,"¹ the light soils, the Sheep-Corn Region was renowned for its barley production, with wheat of secondary importance; the foot of the sheep did indeed turn the Norfolk

¹ Tathe—"a provincial term, conveying a compound idea, for which we have no English word. When we make use of the term fold, as applied to the fertilizing effect of sheep pent upon land, we do not mean to convey an idea merely of the foeces they leave behind them, in this case, but also of the urine, the trampling, and perhaps of the perspiration, and the warmth, communicated to the soil by the practice of folding."—Marshall, *The Rural Economy of Norfolk*, 1795, I, pp. 33-4.

sands into gold. In contrast, open fields were less extensive in the Wood-Pasture Region, where piecemeal enclosure had progressed far more rapidly; on these heavier soils of central and south-east Norfolk, heaths and commons were far less in evidence although there was more woodland here than in the Sheep-Corn Region. Both heavier and more fertile, these soils did not need intensive sheep-dunging, and although barley was still the predominant cereal, wheat was of considerably greater importance than in the Sheep-Corn Region. Finally, the conditions in the Wood-Pasture Region were far more favourable for the development of good grassland, and it was said that this part of the county was "sustained chiefly by graseinge, by Deyries and rearings of Cattell."¹

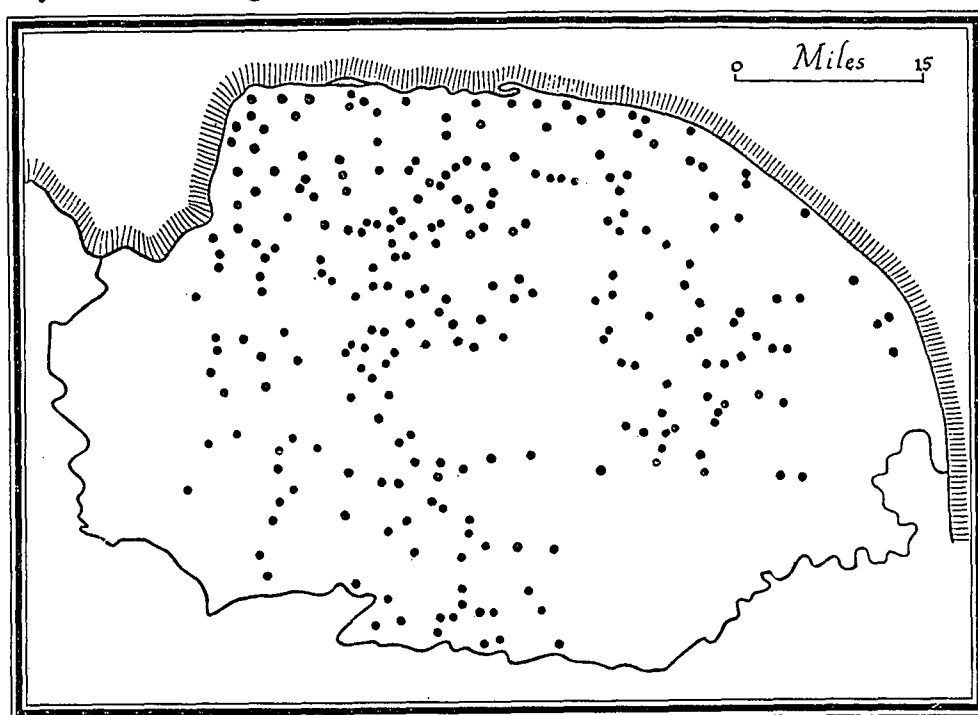


FIG. II

Distribution of Foldcourses.

The limits of the Sheep-Corn Region may be accurately established by mapping the townships for which evidence of the peculiar Norfolk sheep-corn husbandry has been found. The basis of that husbandry was the fold-course, an institution unique to this county and to the north-west of Suffolk.²

¹ MS. printed by W. Rye (ed.), *State Papers Relating to Norfolk*, 1907, pp. 180-7.

² Some of the provisions of Statute 25 Henry VIII, c. 13, applied to foldcourse owners in both Norfolk and Suffolk. See also J. Spratt, 'Agrarian Conditions in Norfolk and Suffolk, 1600-1650', M.A. thesis, University of London, 1935, pp. 199-200, unpublished.

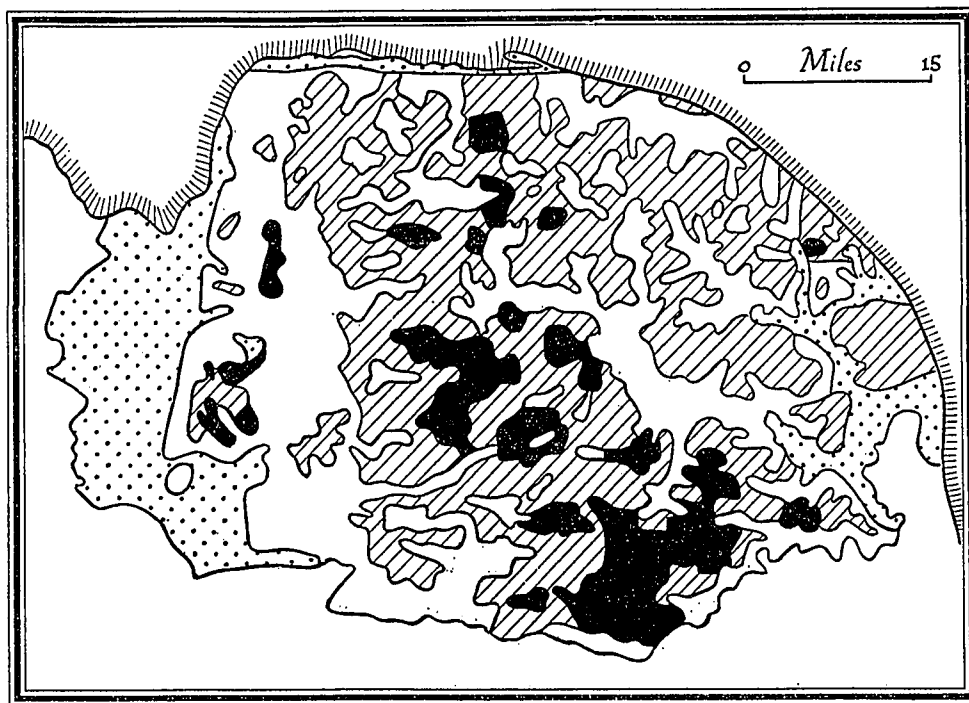


FIG. III

Soil Types: Alluvium, Light, Medium, Heavy.

Fig. II shows the distribution of some 250 townships in which the fold-course system is known to have been used.¹ Comparison with Fig. III shows how close is the correlation between the sheep-corn husbandry and the light and medium soils of the county.

II

Norfolk sheep farming was predominantly the concern of the manorial lord or his lessee. The demesne flocks did not, however, feed solely on demesne land but ranged over the open-field holdings of the lord's tenants. Norfolk villages rarely contained a single manor,² and the open fields and heathland of a village were divided between the flocks of two or more manorial lords: the area allotted to each was called a foldcourse. In the words of certain "poor inhabitants" of Norfolk, "within euery Towne and vyllage

¹ References from a variety of manuscript and printed sources, detailed in K. J. Allison, 'The Wool Supply and the Worsted Cloth Industry in Norfolk in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries', Ph.D. thesis, University of Leeds, 1955, Appendix I, unpublished.

² Even in 1600, after much consolidation of manors had taken place, 30.3 per cent of 637 Norfolk villages contained more than one manor.—Spratt, *thesis cit.*, p. 20.

is most comonly one ij or iij manors or more and to euey manor a Shepps Course or ffouldcourse belongyng."¹

The inclusion of both open-field and heathland within a foldcourse was essential if the flock was to have pasturage available for the whole year. The sheep fed over all the unsown arable land (which they shared with the tenants' great cattle),² but although this was extensive in autumn and winter after the harvest, it was severely limited during the summer months. Consequently, the most important summer pasturage was that provided by the heaths and commons. The importance of the two types of feed was well expressed by Thomas Russell, lord of the manor of North Hall in West Rudham: "Whereas a great part of Norfolk is champion consisting of open fields where the lands of several men lie intermixed, and whereas the commodity and wealth of that part of the county comes chiefly from foldcourses of sheep and corn; the foldcourses being mostly on arable land lying fallow and unsown for certain terms and at certain times for sheep pasture, whereby the land gives greater yeild;" and speaking of his own foldcourse, Russell added "these sheep have always been depastured and fed yearly and at all times of the year on pasture, bruery, and heaths in W. Rudham called the Somer pasture of the said foldcourse."³

Provision was made in all foldcourses for summer and winter pasturage, but in some cases there was variation from the simple formula of heathland and open-field arable land. Foldcourses frequently included closes, both arable and pasture, whose owners were obliged to provide gaps for the sheep to enter at the appropriate seasons. Three of the foldcourses at North Creak, shown on Fig. V,⁴ included closes which were definitely used by the sheep: two of the closes, for example, were "parcell of Shammer foldcourse" and "parcell of Shammer shackle" (the latter was the word used to describe feed on the harvest fields). It will be seen later that the progressive piecemeal enclosure of open-field land during the seventeenth century endangered the foldcourse system, whose existence depended essentially on rights of commonage for sheep over the unsown fields; but ancient closes had fitted easily into the system. The writer of a seventeenth-century treatise on foldcourses⁵ insisted that all land within a foldcourse should be subject to feeding by the lord's sheep: if they did not feed in a tenant's close, then the lord had released it, or taken some composition for it, or the close had never "anciently" been

¹ Public Record Office (=P.R.O.), E 163:16:14 (*temp.* Elizabeth I). See *infra*, pp. 22-5.

² Great cattle were the larger pasture beasts, principally horses, cows, and bullocks.

³ P.R.O., C 2:R 6: 61 (*temp.* Elizabeth I).

⁴ N.P.L., NRS 3503 (undated, early seventeenth century).

⁵ British Museum (=B.M.), Add. MS. 27,403 (undated, seventeenth century).

part of the foldcourse. Some foldcourses also included meadow land, which provided sheep feed after hay had been mown; and in other cases the summer pasture was provided, not by heathland, but by fens and salt marshes.¹ Two of the foldcourses at Holkham, shown on Fig. IV,² included large areas of salt marsh, and this was true of all the villages along the north Norfolk coast.

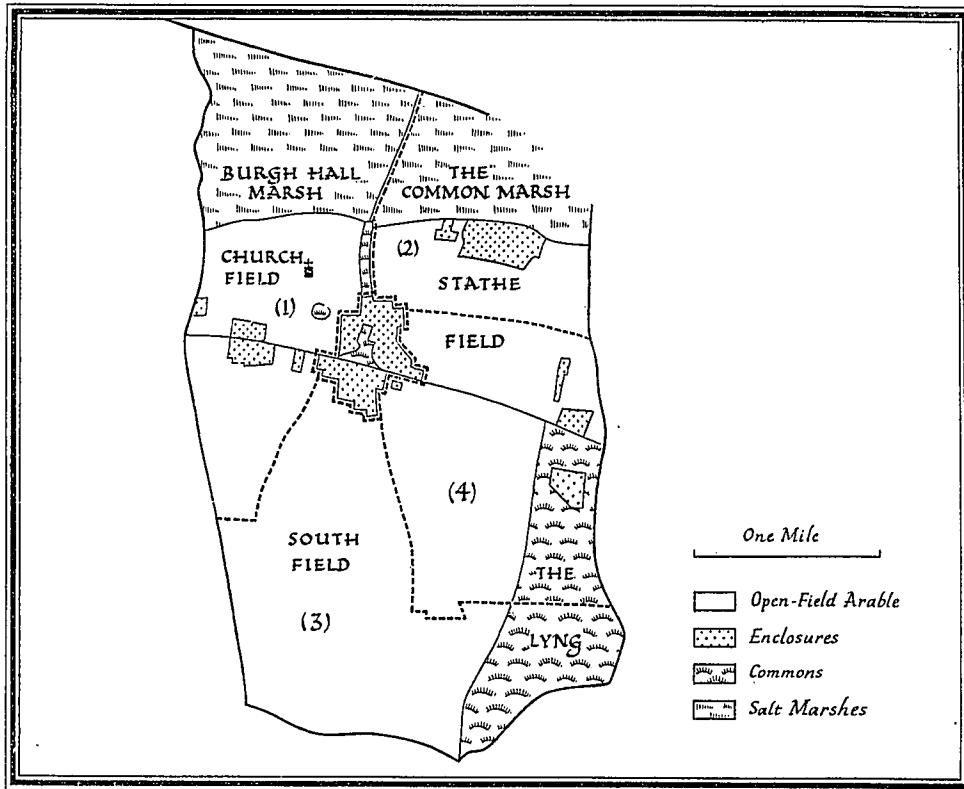


FIG. IV

Holkham 1590. Boundaries of the four Foldcourses shown thus: - - - - -.

Foldcourse boundaries and the extent of land subject to feeding by the flocks were always rigidly fixed. In special circumstances additional pasture could be provided: at Sculthorpe, for example, Thomas Fermor had the right to feed his flocks over 50 acres of ground during the winter months "in

¹ E.g., at Feltwell, on the Fenland border, a foldcourse included open-field arable land, heathland, meadows, and fens.—N.P.L., NRS 10030 (1539-40).

² Holkham MSS., Map 1 (1590). I am indebted to the earl of Leicester for permission to consult the documents at Holkham and to publish this map, and to his librarian, Dr W. O. Hassall, for his assistance.

the time of froste and snowe and not other wyse."¹ Since foldcourses were fixed in area, an equally strict customary limit was placed on the size of flocks which could be maintained. While most foldcourses carried a few hundred sheep, some were sufficiently large for flocks of over 2,000 head.

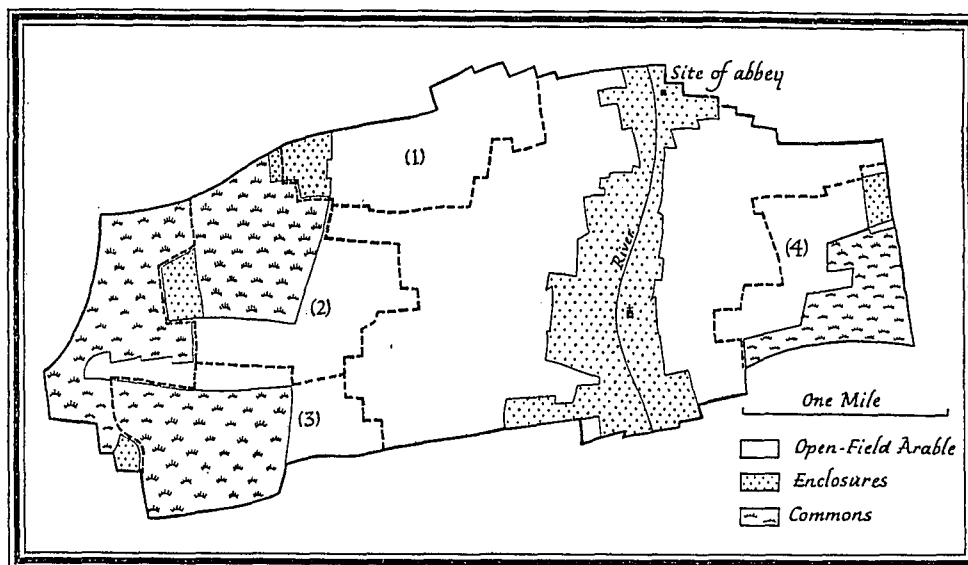


FIG. V

North Creake. Early seventeenth-century boundaries of the four Foldcourses shown thus: - - - - -.

In some villages, like West Lexham,² the entire open-field area lay within the bounds of a single foldcourse; in others, foldcourse boundaries, like manorial land ownership, transgressed parish boundaries. But since most villages contained a number of manors, it was far more usual for the open arable fields to be divided between a number of foldcourses. In many cases, the foldcourses between them occupied the whole of the arable fields: as Fig. IV shows, this was so at Holkham, where Church, Stathe, and South Fields lay within the four foldcourses. Fig. V illustrates the opposite situation: the four foldcourses there covered only part of the fields, the remainder being enjoyed solely by the tenants' great cattle during the appropriate seasons. The extent of summer feed provided by heathland was equally variable. In some villages, the heathland was used jointly by lord's flock and tenants' cattle: the Lyng at Holkham (Fig. IV) was used all the year round by the sheep of two foldcourses and by the tenants' "horse, neate, and

¹ N.P.L., NRS 14327 (1584-5).

² Holkham MSS., Map 5: 87A (1575).

swyne.”¹ In other cases, the summer pasture was divided between flocks and cattle, and in others again it was used by the flocks in winter and by the tenants’ stock in summer: it was during the summer that tenants relied most heavily on heathland pasture, for their stock had ample feed during the winter on the harvest fields.

III

It was in the feeding of flocks over the open arable fields that the foldcourse system demanded the closest co-operation between flock-owner and tenant landholders. Although the sheep took most of their summer feed from heaths and commons, they were, throughout the year, moved over those parts of the open fields which were unsown. After harvest, extensive areas of stubble were available, both for the flocks and the tenants’ great cattle; this feed was known as shack, and all tenants had a right of shackage. Feed on the harvest fields was called Michaelmas shack to distinguish it from Lammas shack on meadow land from which hay had been mown.² The shack period on the fields normally lasted for six months, from Michaelmas (29 September) to the Feast of the Annunciation (25 March); but there were local variations, and it might be affected by unseasonable weather or by the crop. Since the shack fields were extensive, there was no need for the lord’s sheep to be separated from tenants’ animals and penned within folds: “all mens cattell go then promiscuously.”³

In addition to winter shackage, the arable land also provided sheep feed “when it lyeth somerley in the somer tyme.”⁴ Much smaller areas of the fields were lying unsown at this season and it was necessary to fold the sheep on the fallow strips: “A foulde is ye least butt most eminent parte (of the whole foldcourse), a small enclosure made with Hyrdells to shutt ye sheep in eyther for Tathing or other wyse ordering of them.”⁵ Even when the summer fallow had been ploughed for winter corn, it was still available for pasturage until the seed was sown; but during this short intermediate period, the foldcourse owner was obliged to fold his sheep on his own strips only and tenants were allowed to tether their great cattle only upon their own holdings.⁶ After winter corn had been sown, of course, those strips were denied to sheep and cattle feeding on the Michaelmas shack.

¹ Holkham MSS., uncatalogued, quoted by H. L. Gray, *English Field Systems*, 1915, pp. 328–9.

² B.M., Add. MS. 27,403 (undated, seventeenth century).

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ P.R.O., E 315: 201: 55–9 and 65–173 (1625 and 1596), quoted by Spratt, *thesis cit.*, p. 245. Also used as sheep feed were ‘ollands’, parcels of land lying unsown for more than one year.

⁵ B.M., Add. MS. 27,403 (undated, seventeenth century).

⁶ P.R.O., Star Chamber 2: 8: 158 (*temp.* Henry VIII).

Close co-operation between landlord and tenants was essential: it was important that the winter shackle should not be fragmented by scattered strips of winter corn, and that summer fallow strips should not be widely dispersed in the sea of spring corn. In fact, customary regulations were observed by tenants to ensure that fallow and sown land should be as compact as possible, and that winter and spring corn were kept separate. To this end, certain areas of the arable fields were set aside for sowing each year: the fields were divided into 'shifts'. According to Thomas Russell, the lord of North Hall in West Rudham, "The custom and usage there is and time out of mind of man has been that lands lying in the fields of W. Rudham have been divided into several shifts or parts of which some have been used yearly and every year and in course have been sown with corn, and some yearly left fallow."¹ At Docking, too, the farmers of the lord's foldcourse had right of shackle in East Field and other field ground in which the sown land lay each year in a 'shyft'.²

The tenants' ability to comply with these regulations was increased by the lay-out of strips in the Norfolk open-field system. Since the rotation of spring corn, winter corn, and fallow was not based on fields or furlongs, it was not necessary for a man's strips to be equally distributed between the different parts of the open-field area of a village. (In Norfolk, it was more usual for the open-field area to be divided into 'precincts' than into 'fields'.) The strips of a tenant's holding were consequently not widely dispersed but were situated relatively compactly in one sector of the fields. When that sector lay within a sown shift, the tenant sowed his land accordingly; when it lay within a fallow shift, he refrained from doing so. The owners of foldcourses normally gave a tenant compensation for obliging him to leave his strips fallow during any one year, compensation taking the form of demesne land offered in exchange, a temporary reduction in rent, or an increased number of animals which the tenants might put into the lords' flocks.³ But the tenants, in some townships at least, were obliged to make an annual payment for each acre that benefited from tathing by the lords' flocks.

In the previous paragraph, mention was made of one other important aspect of the co-operation between flock-owner and tenants. Many tenants

¹ P.R.O., C 2:R 6:61 (*temp.* Elizabeth I).

² P.R.O., C 2:H 11:45 (1591).

³ B.M., Add. MS. 27,403 (undated, seventeenth century). E.g. at Sedgeford, "where it falls out in Course that any of the Coppiehold or ffreehold lands are to ly lay for the purpose aforesaid (shackle) the lord allowes to the Tenants in exchang recompense for the same a like quantity of his Demeane arrable lands."—L'Estrange MSS., Box IC (eighteenth century). At Hindringham, certain tenants were obliged to give up their lands lying in the summer pasture of a foldcourse—they were given compensation of either other land in exchange or 8d. per acre involved.—P.R.O., DL 3:49 (1541-2).

possessed a 'cullet right' which enabled them to keep a few sheep in the lords' flocks. In most townships of the Sheep-Corn Region, therefore, tenants had three sources of feed for their animals: their great cattle were turned on to the shackage of the harvest fields, their great cattle and sheep fed on the heathland commons, and a small number of sheep was put into the demesne flock. Cullet rights assumed even greater importance in those townships where tenants had no other means of feeding their sheep. This was the case at Holkham: the tenants' horses, cattle, and pigs shared with the lord's flock both the heathland and the shack fields of which Caldowe foldcourse was comprised, but neither heathland nor shack fields were available for tenants' sheep.¹ These tenants did, however, have cullet rights, and in 1559, for example, Caldowe flock was made up of 725 of the lord's sheep and 150 belonging to 10 tenants.²

The numbers of sheep put into a flock by individual tenants were determined by the amount of land which they owned in the open fields. "By the custom of the said county any man that have any land lying in any open field (except such as has liberty of foldcourse and foldage) ought to shack there with his cattle according to the proportion of his land lying in the said field;" and this cullet right "is to have a number of sheep certain appurtenant to some tenement as a hundred or two hundred sheep going and feeding after or with the lords flock."³ The number of cullet sheep reached several hundreds in the larger flocks.

Cullet sheep were tended throughout the year by the lord's shepherd, but tenants took both the increase of lambs and the wool clip. If any cullet sheep died or were sold, others could be put into the flock to replace them, but the number was never to exceed that allotted to each tenant and in the summer any excess resulting from the birth of lambs was to be removed. Tenants were obliged to wash, clip, and brand their own sheep, and they made a small payment to their landlord for the privilege of putting each animal into the flock. In some cases, however, cullet rights were restricted to the freeholders in a village and no payment was exacted from them; a similar allowance was usually made to shepherds and was their most valuable perquisite of office.⁴

¹ Holkham MSS., uncatalogued, quoted by Gray, *op. cit.*, pp. 328-9.

² Holkham MSS., Holkham Deeds, 10:318.

³ P.R.O., Star Chamber 3:3:42 (*temp.* Edward VI).

⁴ The sheep accounts of flock-owners give details of such payments and allowances; these accounts are examined in Allison, *thesis cit.*, pp. 187-306.

IV

When co-operation between landlord and tenant was forthcoming, the foldcourse system was mutually beneficial, but there was a potential divergence of interest between them as flock-owner and corn-grower. The ill effects of that divergence were keenly felt during the sixteenth century when many landlords were giving increased attention to their sheep farming. Often they farmed out their demesne land but retained their foldcourses, and widespread landlord abuse of the foldcourse system goes far towards explaining the peasants' antipathy towards its regulations, and their increasing resistance to its maintenance in the seventeenth century.

The Norfolk rebellion of 1549 was largely inspired by social and agrarian grievances; thirteen of Ket's twenty-seven complaints related directly to the agrarian situation, and two aimed at limiting the number of sheep owned by landlords. It was, in Professor Bindoff's words, "a radical programme, indeed, which would have clipped the wings of rural capitalism."¹ But the rebels were routed near Norwich and Ket was hanged; this was merely an interlude in the story of oppression that was intensified in the second half of the century. The forms which that abuse was taking are clearly indicated in a petition submitted to Queen Elizabeth by certain "poor inhabitants of Norfolk"²—and their complaints centred around the gentlemen's abuse of the foldcourse system.

Customary regulations required flock-owners to fulfil a number of obligations to tenants who possessed land in their foldcourses. But as the poor inhabitants alleged, and as abundant evidence confirms, they frequently failed to do so. They made no allowance to tenants for the use of unsown land; they lengthened the shack period;³ and they fed their flocks over winter corn sown by tenants.⁴ The petitioners claimed, moreover, that their own cattle could not be fed in the fields, "the Shak ons defyled and oueronne ons with sheppe," and they asked for the shack period to be limited to the three months between 1 November and 2 February. Even more damaging to tenants' rights was the diminution of shackage by landlords. Both lord's flock and tenants' cattle shared the shackage of demesne and tenants' land alike; but landlords frequently enclosed their demesne strips

¹ *Ket's Rebellion, 1549*, Historical Association, 1949, p. 9.

² P.R.O., E 163:16:14 (*temp.* Elizabeth I).

³ E.g. at Fakenham in 1520, until 3 May.—P.R.O., Star Chamber 2:15:11-13.

⁴ E.g., the inhabitants of Alethorpe alleged that the lord of the manor "breaketh up other mens seuerall grownde for the more freer passage and ease of his sheepe, and as it is well to be proved, even att this tyme doth drive over their new sowen winter corne and into their home yards and Orchards, eatinge spoylinge and breaking downe their new sett grists and plants." MS. printed in *Norfolk Archaeology*, x, 1888, pp. 150-1.

in the open fields, enjoyed the sole right of shackle on the enclosed strips, and yet put an undiminished flock on to the remaining stubbles.¹ In some cases, such enclosure of demesne land in the open fields caused flocks to be depastured for a prolonged period on the heathland sector of the foldcourse, to the detriment of tenants' common rights there.² Demesne enclosures, like those made by tenants, should have been laid open to tenants' cattle as well as to the flock during the appropriate seasons.³ Other landlords fed a larger flock on the fields than the feed would support, extended foldcourses to land that did not customarily lie within their bounds, and even set up completely new foldcourses.⁴

A great wealth of evidence suggests that abuse of tenants' rights of commonage on heathland and waste ground was even more widespread. Flock-owners commonly overstocked the commons with larger flocks than their foldcourses customarily carried, and they used commons which, in the poor inhabitants' words, "ought to be noo parcell of eny ffoulde coursse." With summer heathland pasture 'surcharged' by enlarged flocks, tenants were losing commonage when they most needed it, and a frequent demand was that lords should respect their tenants' sole right to use certain areas of heathland during the summer: the period suggested by the poor inhabitants was from 2 February to 1 September. In many cases, the overstocking of commons did not satisfy the gentlemen's "unlawfull desyres of suche thyngs as be not ther owen," and many heaths were enclosed for the sole benefit of their flocks.⁵

Flocks were increased in number and size by one other means: the denial of tenants' culet rights. The poor inhabitants complained that they could keep scarcely any sheep in the foldcourses, "neyther ffor the lands that they

¹ At Alethorpe again, it was alleged against the lord that "whereas many of his growndes lay open heretofore, for the maintenance of his fold course, he hath now inclosed the moste parte of them and keepeth them several to himself all the yeare and yett notwithstanding doth mantayne his full number of sheepe as ever he did before."—*ibid.*

² E.g., at Woodbastwick, open demesne land was enclosed, with the result that the sheep fed to a far greater extent on Mousehold Heath.—P.R.O., E 178: 7153 (1588-9).

³ "One who hath purchased divers parcells together, in which the inhabitants have used to have shackle, and long time since have enclosed it, and notwithstanding allwayes after harvest the inhabitants have had shackle there by passing into it by bars or gates with their cattell there, it shall be taken as common appendent or appurtenant and the owner cannot exclude them of common there, notwithstanding that he will not common with them, but hold his owne lands so inclosed."—Le Neve's MS. Collections, fo. 67d, printed by W. Rye, *Materials for the History of the Hundred of North Erpingham*, 1883, I, p. 28.

⁴ E.g., at Hunworth: B.M., Add. MS. 39,221 (1611); at Kilverstone: P.R.O., E 134: 35 Elizabeth/Easter 24 (1592); and at Great Dunham: P.R.O., Requests 2: 252: 20 (1551).

⁵ E.g., this was yet another complaint made by the inhabitants of Alethorpe.

haue in the seyde Townes or vyllages, althowe the seyde Sheppe do ffede or pasture the halffe yere and more upon the same Tenants londs, nor yet for ther money." Evidence from other sources again supports their allegations.¹ Cullet rights were often limited to the freeholders in a village, but the petitioners wanted the privilege to be universally extended to other tenancies, too; and they demanded that cullet sheep should be allowed in respect of tenants' land lying in the foldcourses without any money payment.

By abusing the foldcourse system, landlords were able to enlarge their flocks without recourse to the large-scale enclosure and conversion of open-field arable land to pasture that took place in certain parts of England. Small-scale enclosure and conversion was, however, frequent as a corollary of the forms of oppression peculiar to Norfolk: the enclosure commissioners of 1517 reported nearly 10,500 acres allegedly enclosed in Norfolk, but the majority of the individual enclosures were of small extent.² Moreover, fewer than 8,700 of those acres were converted from tillage to pasture. Some of the enclosures remained in arable cultivation, but they involved the removal of open-field demesne land into severalty and the extinction of tenants' rights of shackle; others involved the surrender of tenants' rights of commonage on pasture land enclosed.³

Enclosure and conversion alone were rarely so extensive in Norfolk as to cause village depopulation of the Midland type;⁴ but the Norfolk landlords' manifold abuses of the foldcourse system often achieved that result by a more gradual process. Those abuses were frequently accompanied by the acquisition of houses, landholdings, and commons; large estates were built up, and villages were depopulated. There is a considerable body of evidence to support the poor petitioners' allegations: their petition would have been readily signed by the inhabitants of the lost village of Alethorpe, whose landlord had driven his sheep into their corn, home-yards, and orchards, deprived them of their shackle, and surcharged and enclosed their common;⁵ they would have been supported by the people of Sturston, evicted

¹ E.g., at Taverham, the foldcourse owner removed cullet sheep from the flock and sold them; one tenant was denied his right to keep fifty sheep in the flock in respect of nineteen acres which he owned in the foldcourse.—P.R.O., C 1: 1219: 16-19 (1544-53).

² The returns of this Commission of Enquiry are analysed by I. S. Leadam, 'The Inquisition of 1517, Inclosures and Evictions', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, New Series, VII, 1893, pp. 134-218. The returns covered all but two hundreds of the county.

³ These two types of enclosure accounted for 1,485 and 277 acres respectively, out of the total of 10,454 acres.

⁴ The Commissioners reported that the hamlet of Holt had been depopulated by the enclosure and conversion of arable land to sheep pasture; the extensive enclosure and conversion which they found at Choseley probably accounts for the depopulation of that village.

⁵ *Supra*, p. 22, n. 4, p. 23, n. 1, 5.

by a landlord who had appropriated their land and commons, pulled down their houses with the exception of three which he converted into malting, brewing, and dairy houses, taken over the glebelands, and added the glebe foldcourse to his own two courses;¹ they would have been joined by evicted tenants in the lost village of Narford,² and by the tenants of the notorious Thomas Thursby and his son, who had converted their holdings to sheep pasture, evicted them from their dwellings, deprived them of their commons, and pulled down their houses in numerous villages, including four that are now deserted.³

Although landlord oppression caused the complete depopulation of a number of villages and the shrinkage of many others, little extension of permanent sheep pasture was involved and the foldcourse system was not discarded. In the conditions of the Sheep-Corn Region, even the depopulating landlord maintained the sheep-corn husbandry, although every acre in the foldcourse and every sheep in the flock was now his own. The village of Pudding Norton had been depopulated in the sixteenth century, but when the lord of the manor died in 1617, his wealth did not lie solely in his sheep: the flock feeding in Pudding Norton was valued at £240, and the crops grown there at £334.⁴ Although many of them were anxious to exclude their tenants from participation in the sheep-corn husbandry, it was not the landlords who, as early as the sixteenth century, expressed dissatisfaction with the foldcourse system.

V

During the sixteenth century, many landlords and flock-owners found it increasingly difficult to secure the essential co-operation of their tenants: the normal restrictions of the foldcourse husbandry were becoming more and more irksome to tenants who were in danger of losing their share of the benefits of the system. Individual tenants were failing in two ways to fulfil their obligations: they were sowing their corn on parcels of land dispersed throughout the open fields, contrary to the shift system, and they were en-

¹ P.R.O., E 123: 23 (1597), E 134: 38-9 Elizabeth/Michaelmas 9 (1597), E 123: 26 (1597), E 207: 33: 3 (1598).

² P.R.O., E 134: 21-2 Elizabeth/Michaelmas 31 (1578-9).

³ Report of the 1517 Commission of Enquiry, see Leadam, *op. cit.*, p. 153; P.R.O., C 2: W15: 61 (1522), Star Chamber 2: 15: 76-7 (1534), Star Chamber 3: 6: 13 (1540), Requests 2: 18: 114 (1548), Requests 2: 138: 49 (1587), Star Chamber 8: 182: 23 (1616). For village depopulation, see K. J. Allison, 'The Lost Villages of Norfolk', *Norfolk Archaeology*, xxxi, 1955, pp. 116-62.

⁴ Testamentary inventory of William Reynold; Bishop's Chapel, Norwich, inventories, Johnson 147.

closing their open-field strips to exclude the lords' flocks from summerley and shackle.

Thomas Russell of West Rudham declared that with the observance of the shift system by his tenants, "the sheep of the said foldcourse can more conveniently feed and shack;" but he complained that two of his tenants had disregarded the shifts by sowing dispersed and contiguous strips, sowing spring and winter corn on adjacent strips, enclosing several parcels of their land, and sowing strips that lay within the shift set apart for summer fallowing.¹ Similarly at Docking in 1591, the shift for winter corn consisted of about 100 acres in East Field, leaving about 1,000 acres unsown for shackle; but two tenants had sown strips outside the shift.² And again, at Holkham, three men sowed several strips dispersed in South Field with "sundry kinds of corn," thus "incompassing some parts of the said foldcourse circlewise with one or two ridges of corn."³ In such cases as these, sheep were denied access to part of the unsown fields and were deprived of feed on the strips which had been illegally sown.

Similar results followed the enclosure of tenants' open-field strips: not only did the flock lose its feed over the enclosed parcels, but its free passage over the fields was obstructed. If such piecemeal enclosure was carried out on a large scale, foldcourses were threatened with complete disruption. In 1592 the lord of Beck Hall in Foxley listed the "Lands Inclosed within the shackle of ffoxley," which had been "always before fed with ffoxley flocke in shack time;" he showed that nineteen tenants had enclosed twenty-one parcels of land totalling $70\frac{1}{4}$ acres, and that the closes prevented the flock from reaching a further $14\frac{1}{2}$ acres of the fields.⁴ Tenants were at first obliged to lay open such obstructive closes, but as piecemeal enclosure became more widespread, many landlords were persuaded to tolerate the closes, provided that gaps were made for sheep to enter when the land was unsown, especially in shack time. Already at Great Bittering in 1533-4, for example, a landlord upheld his right to feed his flock over the shack fields, and tenants who had made enclosures during the previous twenty years were ordered, not to remove their fences, but simply to open their closes at shack time.⁵ By tolerating these 'half-year closes', landlords had admitted the thin end of a wedge that was to be firmly driven home during the seventeenth century.

In 1627 a Privy Council order was necessary to force tenants to observe the customary regulations at Anmer, and the justices foresaw the ultimate

¹ P.R.O., C 2:R6:61 (*temp.* Elizabeth I).

² P.R.O., C 2:H 11:45; *supra*, p. 20.

³ P.R.O., C 2:R4:18 (*temp.* Elizabeth I).

⁴ Holkham MSS., Billingford and Bintree Deeds 12:846.

⁵ Carthew, *The Hundred of Launditch*, 1878, II, p. 560.

breakdown of the foldcourse system if such difficulties increased. "This Court was now of opinion that the plowing and sowing of small quantities of land dispersedlye or disorderlye within ye shacks and winter feedinge of ye said ffouldcourses, and the refusal of a few wilfull persons to lett ye owners of ffouldcourses have their quilletts of land (Llying intermixt in the places where ye sheep pasture is layd) upon indifferent exchange or other recompense for the same, are things very mischievous and will tend to ye overthrow of very many fold courses."¹

Half-year closes, sometimes called half-year or shack lands, were increasingly tolerated during the seventeenth century; and half-year lands were gradually converted to whole-year lands, upon which the flocks were no longer entitled to feed. At Kenninghall in 1610, for example, the tenants purchased their lands lying in the foldcourse in order to make them whole-year lands.² By such agreements, tenants lost the benefit of tathing, but they gained freedom from common-field and foldcourse restrictions and were enabled to introduce improved methods of cultivation.

The most noticeable of such improvements was the introduction of turnips as a field crop.³ The cultivation of autumn-sown turnips was incompatible with the foldcourse system, for land no longer lay unsown for winter shackage, and piecemeal enclosure often went hand in hand with the introduction of turnips. Nevertheless, many landlords fought hard to maintain their flocks. At Shropham in 1681, for example, a tenant was summoned to appear in the manorial court after he had harvested a rye crop only to sow the land immediately with turnips, and when similar trouble was encountered there in 1696, the owner of the flock was instructed to "turne in his sheep and eat vp the Turnips" if the offender gave no satisfaction.⁴ Even when landlords were forced to accept turnip cultivation by tenants, they often attempted to reconcile it with the foldcourse system. The farmer of a

¹ Privy Council Orders, 1627, printed in W. Rye, *State Papers Relating to Norfolk*, pp. 70-1.

² Blomefield, *op. cit.*, I, p. 220.

³ The field cultivation of turnips in Norfolk began in the first half of the seventeenth century and was well established by the latter half of the century. Early references to both turnips and carrots in Norfolk concern their growth as garden crops in closes outside the city of Norwich by Dutch immigrants after 1565: P.R.O., SP 12:20:49 (1575); Norwich Corporation Muniment Room (N.C.M.R.), Court Books (C.B.) 13:110 (1596), 190 (1598), 15:506d (1623), 16:455, 457 (1633), for example. Turnip cultivation was not, of course, limited to the Sheep-Corn Region of Norfolk but was developed equally in the Wood-Pasture Region. Dr Kerridge has recently written of the turnip husbandry of High Suffolk in the seventeenth century, in conditions almost identical with those of High Norfolk—i.e. the Wood-Pasture Region; three of the "Suffolk" villages for which Dr Kerridge has found early references to turnip cultivation are, in fact, in Norfolk.—*Economic History Review*, Second Series, VIII, 1956, pp. 390-2.

⁴ N.C.M.R., C.B. 25:98; 26:24d.

foldcourse in Foxley tried to do so in 1755: he agreed to accept two shillings per acre for shackle lost on land sown with turnips, but he obliged tenants to cultivate the crop only on such enclosed and open-field lands "as shall lye in Shifts or Contiguous together." At Michaelmas, when shackle began, his tenants were to "hurdle or Fence the same out with a Fencing Stuff in such a manner as the Shepherd . . . may without any Annoyance keep the flock . . . from feeding of the said Turnips."¹ By such means, the disruption of many foldcourses was delayed until they were finally removed by the Parliamentary Enclosure Acts in the second half of the eighteenth century.²

VI

In many parishes in the Sheep-Corn Region, enclosure and the extinction of the foldcourse system were not left to the Parliamentary Enclosure Acts. While some landlords fought to maintain their foldcourses until the eighteenth century, many other, more progressive, farmers had reorganized their estates during the seventeenth century, and numerous parishes were wholly or partially enclosed by the time the Enclosure Commissioners arrived. On these estates the traditional Norfolk open-field system was completely displaced: the arable fields were enclosed as the 'infield'; the heaths and commons were divided into enclosed brecks, and became the 'outfield'. The infields were leased in large, compact farms to tenant farmers whose labour was provided by the remainder of the former open-field landholders. New crops, rotations, and methods of fertilization replaced tathing, but sheep assumed a new importance, folded and fattened on turnips. The outfield brecks might be included in these farms, but were often leased separately as 'foldcourses'³ (although they bore little resemblance to the traditional foldcourses) and were prepared for periodic cultivation by large flocks.⁴

¹ Holkham MSS., Billingford and Bintree Deeds 15:1003-4. Similar conditions were imposed on tenants in Hellesdon in 1723 when turnips and carrots were cultivated as field crops.—N.P.L., MS. 9697 (bundle of MSS. concerning the foldcourse, 1684 to 1723).

² E.g., that for Happisburgh and Lessingham in 1801 was "An Act for dividing, allotting, and inclosing the open and common fields, half-year or shack lands, commons, severals, and waste grounds within the parishes—and for extinguishing all rights of sheepwalk and shackle in, over and upon the lands and grounds within the said parish of Happisburgh."—Statute 41 George III, c. 22.

³ E.g., at Warham in 1712, the heathland consisted of "The breaks or fold course."—Holkham MSS., Map 2:23.

⁴ Farmers of foldcourses were strictly bound by their leases: for example, L'Estrange insisted in 1696 that one lessee should "tath in ye last year as much of the Brecks and Cleylands as shall be somertilled, with his Flock which shall consist of 700^c sheep and the Fold to consist of 8 dozen hurdles sett in a square fold."—L'Estrange MSS., KA 14.

As a feature of the changes involved in the development of the new Norfolk Husbandry, the infield-outfield system was the creation of the later seventeenth- and eighteenth-century improvers. In some parts of the country, however, an infield-outfield system was employed at a much earlier period for the cultivation of sandy and infertile soils. In Northumberland and Cumberland, for example, it has been shown that the infield-outfield system was the primitive predecessor of open-field farming.¹ The infield-outfield system of Norfolk was of an entirely different nature.

Until the seventeenth century, most villages in the Sheep-Corn Region of Norfolk contained a large, permanently cultivated field, and extensive outlying heaths and commons (see Figs. IV and V, for example). In some cases, modification of this lay-out began in the sixteenth century: a few acres of heathland lying in a foldcourse, and dinged by a flock of sheep, were occasionally tilled.² Later, such pieces of heathland were enclosed as brecks and tilled at regular intervals. But no essential change in the Norfolk open-field system was involved, and the foldcourse husbandry was not affected by the fact that the new brecks fluctuated, as it were, between the arable and heathland sectors of the foldcourse.³ It was, indeed, sometimes land in the demesne brecks that a landlord offered to his tenants in exchange for feed on their strips that lay within the summer fallow shift of his foldcourse.⁴ This stage in the development of the infield-outfield system is well illustrated by the situation at West Wretham and Great Massingham.

During the seventeenth century the cultivation of heathland brecks was greatly extended; flocks then fed on the unenclosed heathland, the brecks, and the summer fallow and winter shackle of the open-field arable land—the infield. A further improvement was effected by dispensing with summer fallowing as methods of husbandry improved.⁵ Finally, in the later seventeenth and early eighteenth century, both heathland and open fields were completely enclosed, and the terms ‘infield’ and ‘outfield’ were widely used for the permanently cultivated closes and the periodically tilled brecks.

¹ See the discussion by H. P. R. Finberg, ‘The Open Field in Devon’, in Hoskins and Finberg, *Devonshire Studies*, 1952, pp. 283–8.

² E.g., at Hargham a foldcourse included heathland, common and waste land, part of which “may be plowed at ye Lord’s pleasure.”—B.M. Hargreaves 249 (1629).

³ E.g., at West Wretham the heathland included seven brecks—the outfield; the whole of the heathland, including the brecks, and the open infield lay within the demesne foldcourse. See H. C. Darby and J. Saltmarsh, ‘The Infield-Outfield System on a Norfolk Manor’, *Economic History*, III, 1935, pp. 30–44. And at Great Massingham, three foldcourses extended over the open arable infield and the “owte fyldes or sheps walks.”—Holkham MSS., Massingham Deed 6:103 (1538–9) gives the earliest available reference to the system here.

⁴ E.g., at Docking.—P.R.O., C 2:H 11:45 (1591). For such exchange, see *supra*, p. 20.

⁵ L’Estrange MSS., Box IC (undated, early eighteenth century).

These changes are perhaps best illustrated by maps of the earl of Leicester's estates.¹ The infield-outfield system in Norfolk was the basis of a husbandry greatly improved from that of the traditional Norfolk open-field system.

A quantitative assessment of the different ways in which the traditional sheep-corn husbandry was displaced is impossible. Throughout the Sheep-Corn Region, modifications and improvements were being made during the seventeenth century as new crops and methods were introduced. In some areas, above all in the Good Sand Region, extensive enclosure had ousted open-field farming and profoundly changed the nature of the foldcourse system by the early eighteenth century. While the more progressive farmers had recognized the inefficiency of common-field farming and the profitability of mutton production in a new sheep-corn-turnip husbandry, other landlords had attempted to maintain the traditional foldcourse system and to reconcile it with the increasingly popular piecemeal enclosure and turnip cultivation by their tenants. For this reason, the foldcourse system survived precariously in many townships until the second half of the eighteenth century, to receive its death-blow from the Parliamentary Enclosure Acts. Soon after 1800, open-field farming and the foldcourse system were finally superseded by the new Norfolk Husbandry throughout the Sheep-Corn Region.

¹ E.g., Flitcham, N.P.L. MS. 4290 (map, 1550-80), 4293 (map, 1655), 4295 (map, 1728-44), 4296 (map, 1828); Wighton, Holkham MSS., maps 3:27 (1720), 3:31 (c. 1750); Longham Holkham MSS., maps 5:92 (c. 1580), 5:93 (1700-25).

NOTES AND COMMENTS (*continued from page 11*)

it is hoped to publish articles on, "the problems of folk life in England, Ireland, Man, Scotland, and Wales," as well as material on cultural links with Scandinavia, Europe, and America. He also explains that the name *Gwerin* was chosen since it is the Welsh word for folk, and he defends its choice on the grounds that the inspiration for it, and many of its subscribers, came from Wales. Since, however, the aim is to produce a publication of universal appeal a title in a more commonly understood language would be preferable.

Volume I No. 1 contains articles on the construction of straw rope granaries in Ireland by A. T. Lucas, Hebridean traditions

by C. I. Maclean, rake and scythe-handle making in Bedfordshire and Suffolk by T. W. Bagshawe, and a note on the Welsh folk-life survey. Future numbers will contain book reviews. *Gwerin* is published by Basil Blackwell in Oxford, and an annual subscription for two issues costs twelve shillings.

SHOOTING ON HILL PASTURES

Capt. Sir Hugh Rhys-Rankin writes:

I should like to emphasize a point in British farm history which no historian has yet noticed, namely, the effect of shootings upon the hill sheep industry and on sheep

(*continued on page 51*)