

Some Terms used in Agrarian History

A GLOSSARY

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EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION

AGRARIAN history, like other branches of learning, not infrequently finds itself bedevilled in discussion and exposition by ambiguity in the terms employed. Either the terms themselves lack precision, or the writer uses them in a sense different from that commonly understood, and feels safe in doing so because there is no generally accepted standard. The glossary which follows has been drafted by Mr Butlin at my invitation, as a first step towards the adoption of an agreed terminology. It deals principally with the language of open-field husbandry, and therefore should be regarded as a first instalment, to be followed later perhaps by a glossary of terms used in modern farming. The definitions it offers are provisional; readers who disagree with them are invited to propound alternative definitions of their own. It is published in the hope that after discussion and revision it will find acceptance with writers in this REVIEW and contributors to the *Agrarian History of England and Wales* now in progress.

ED., A.H.R.

ACRE. See LAND MEASUREMENT.

AGISTMENT. The pasturing of one person's animals on another's land on payment of a due. In relation to common land, it signifies the letting to another of a commoner's right to pasture his stock (but not a right APPENDANT).

APPENDANT. See COMMON, Right of.

APPURTENANT. See COMMON, Right of.

ASSART. A piece of land, taken from waste or forest, cleared of trees, and converted into arable (from French verb *essarter*, to grub up).

BALK (BAULK). An unploughed piece of land in a common arable field, with various uses: as an access path, by which a tenant could reach his land (known as a FOOTBALK); a boundary between shotts, strips, and other units of arable; or merely places which are unsuitable for cultivation. Balks were often grazed by tethered animals.

BEASTGAIT. See STINT.

BOVATE. See LAND MEASUREMENT.

BUTT. A section in a common arable field which has been shortened by the irregular shape of the field, and is therefore shorter than the others in the shott.

CALMING. The reaping of stubble left in the arable field after the ears of corn have been reaped.

CATTLEGAIT. See STINT.

COMMON APPENDANT. A right of common given by law to the freeholders of a manor (those who held land granted as freehold arable by the lord of the manor before the Statute of Quia Emptores in 1290) to depasture their commonable animals on the waste of the manor. At a later date, the right was limited to those commonable animals which were "levant and couchant" on the tenement, i.e. those commonable animals which could be maintained throughout the winter on the land to which the right was appendant. After 1290, the right could be claimed by prescription only.

COMMON APPURTENANT. A right of common of pasture which depends on express grant by the owner of the soil or on prescription, and is attached to a particular holding. The right may be granted to a person who is not a customary tenant of the manor, e.g. a freeholder who is a tenant in fee simple, and may exist in respect of animals other than commonable animals, and in respect of land which was not part of the ancient arable land of the manor.

COMMON ARABLE. Arable land, contained in common fields, which became commonable after harvest.

COMMON FIELD. Land cultivated in common, including arable and meadow land.

COMMON-FIELD HUSBANDRY. See FIELD SYSTEMS.

COMMON IN GROSS. A right to have grazing and other rights in the waste irrespective of any ownership of land, for the right is annexed to a man's person, either by grant to him and his heirs by deed, or it may be claimed by prescription.

COMMON LAND. Land subject to common rights.

COMMON MEADOW. Land, cropped for hay, which reverted, once the hay had been lifted (usually at Lammas-tide), to the whole community; then commonable animals were pastured on it. The common meadow was often low-lying alluvial land, adjoining a stream or river. If the ownership of the individual portions was not fixed, the strips of meadow might be allotted by rotation or by lot. See DOLE MEADOW, LOT MEADOW.

COMMON OF ESTOVER. The common right, appurtenant or in gross, to take wood from the waste or woods of a manor. This right includes: *Plowbote*, the right to take wood to repair ploughs, carts, and farm implements; *Firebote*, the right to take tree loppings for fuel; *Hedgebote* (or *Heybote*), the right to take wood for the repair of fences and gates; *Housebote*, the right to take wood to repair a house.

COMMON OF PASTURE. The most

important of the rights of common. This includes Common Appendant, Common Appurtenant, Common in gross, Common pur cause de vicinage, and Common of Shack.

COMMON OF PISCARY. The right to fish in waters belonging to another person.

COMMON OF SHACK. The right of customary tenants and freeholders to pasture their commonable animals over the arable and meadow land of the manor between harvest and seed-time, or over the parts of the manor which were temporarily lying fallow.

COMMON OF TURBARY. The right to take peat or turf for fuel.

COMMON PASTURE. Land used exclusively for pasture by manorial tenants. The soil may be vested in the lord of the manor, or in undivided shares in the owners of the pasture right. Because the pasture could, in most instances, be grazed by a limited number of animals (see STINT), and often for only part of the year, the common pasture tended to be land of better quality than the common waste.

COMMON PUR CAUSE DE VICINAGE exists where there are adjoining wastes belonging to different manors, and tenants having a right of pasture over one of the wastes are allowed to pasture their animals on the waste of the other. The right is a permissive one, and overcomes the problem of excess litigation for trespass.

COMMON, RIGHT OF. A right of common is the right which one or more persons have to make use of, or take produce from, the land of another. In most instances the owner of the soil was the lord of the manor, who also enjoyed rights of common thereon.¹ The waste of the manor was vested in the lord in fee simple, but normally subject to customary common rights. In the arable and meadow the strips of the customary tenants were vested in fee simple of the lord of the manor, holding of the Crown, but these tenants had exclusive possession, subject to common rights. When the common arable and meadow were thrown open for pasturing of common-

¹ Some common lands are not in manors, e.g. the common lands of an ancient borough, or of a 'reputed manor'. See Royal Commission on Common Land, 1955-8, Report, Cmd 462, p. 170.

able animals, the ownership of the soil did not change, but the rights of pasture were common rights, because each tenant exercised rights over land other than his own. It is necessary to make the distinction between the rights of common, and sole or exclusive rights (see *SOLE VESTURE* and *SOLE PASTURE*).

Common rights evolved through "an increasing limitation of rights to more sharply defined classes of user. This limitation arose naturally from the pressure of a growing population upon a fixed supply of land throughout historic times. The degree of pressure, and hence the chronology of the limitation of common rights, varied according to local circumstances."¹

COMMON WASTE. This term includes a wide variety of classes of land, all of which were either uncultivated or uncultivable. They were used as permanent sources of grazing for livestock, as sources of fuel, and of material for repairs of houses and implements, and they also allowed the expansion of the arable area to take place, by enclosure and improvement.

COMMONABLE LAND. Land communally used for part of the year (arable, meadow, and sometimes common pasture) which, after harvest, was pastured by the commonable animals until seed-time.

COMMONABLE ANIMALS. Those animals which the holder of a right of common of pasture may lawfully turn out on common or commonable land. If the right is appendant, only horses, sheep, and cattle may normally be pastured; if appurtenant, or in gross, other animals (e.g. pigs and geese) may be pastured, according to local custom. It is important to note, however, that the legal distinction between these types of right of common of pasture did not always obtain in practice, and rights of common of pasture were given for pigs, sheep, and goats—animals which in many areas were non-commonable.

CROFT. A small piece of land, frequently

attached to a house, which was almost invariably enclosed. Crofts are occasionally located within common fields. See *TOFT* and *CROFT*.

DEMESNE. (i) A feudal term, as in the phrase 'in demesne as of fee', meaning a tenement not sub-enfeoffed, i.e. kept in the hands of the owner and descending to his lineal and collateral heirs.

(ii) **Agricultural demesne:** demesne land is the reserve which the lord of the manor cultivates through his own agents so that he may directly consume or sell the produce, as distinct from land held by his tenants. The demesne was frequently sub-let, and could be worked by labour services, by hired labour, or by slaves.

(iii) **ANCIENT DEMESNE.** Land which had formerly been royal demesne land, but which had subsequently been alienated to other landowners.²

(iv) **ROYAL DEMESNE.** Demesne land which belonged to the Crown.

ENCLOSURE. The process of delimiting land by means of a fence or boundary, thus removing it, either temporarily or permanently, from common use. Permanently enclosed land was not usually subject to common rights.

ENCLOSURE IN SEVERALTY. The division of common or commonable land among all persons legally interested, usually in proportion to the value of their respective interests.

ESTOVER. See *COMMON*, Right of.

FALLOW. A period of rest or recuperation during which the ground was ploughed and harrowed, but not sown.

FIELD SYSTEM. The term has hitherto been used to signify "the manner in which the inhabitants of a township subdivided and tilled their arable, meadow, and pasture land."³ The systems of husbandry based on the cultivation of common arable fields varied widely, both in regard to the rotation of crops over the arable area, and in regard to the type

¹ Royal Commission on Common Land, 1955-8, Report, Cmd 462, p. 150.

² For further discussion of the term, see R. S. Hoyt, *The Royal Demesne in English Constitutional History*, Ithaca, N.Y. 1950, and R. H. Hilton, *The Stoneleigh Leger Book*, Dugdale Society Publications, xxiv, 1960, pp. xxiv-xxviii.

³ H. L. Gray, *English Field Systems*, Harvard University Press, 1915, p. 3.

and length of fallow. Thus terms such as 'two-field system' and 'three-field system' seem to have little precise significance. Perhaps it would be better to replace 'field system' with the term COMMON-FIELD HUSBANDRY, i.e. a system of husbandry based on the cultivation of common arable and meadow. Alternatively the term 'field system' could be retained, but its meaning restricted to: a system of husbandry based on two or more common arable fields which served as a framework for cultivation, but within which there were wide variations in cropping and fallowing practice. This would reject the idea, apparently inherent in the use of the term 'field system', that husbandry based on two or three fields of arable followed a fairly rigid pattern.

FOLD-COURSE. An area of common field and heathland, in a township including manorial demesne and tenant land, pastured by the flocks of two or more manorial lords. The common fields, heathlands, and closes of the township were divided into separate areas, and each was allotted to a flock for grazing at certain times of the year. Each area grazed by a flock was a 'fold-course' (Lat. *foldagium*). These were common in the 'sheep-corn' region of East Anglia.

FURLONG. A measure of length, originally the length of a furrow in the common arable field, which varied widely in different areas. As a statutory measure of length, it is equal to one-eighth of a statute mile, or 220 yards. The term had other meanings, e.g. a block of selions in the common arable field, for which the term **SHOT** is here preferred (see below). **FURROW.** A narrow trench made in the earth with a plough. See also **RIDGE AND FURROW**.

GAIT. See **STINT**.

GROSS. See **COMMON**, Rights of.

HEADLAND. A piece of land in a ploughed field, left for convenience in turning the plough at the end of the furrows, or near the boundary of the field.

HIDE. See **LAND MEASUREMENT**.

HIGHBACK. See **RIDGE**.

INFIELD. A common arable field under

permanent cultivation, normally not sown with a winter crop but with a spring crop. Associated with **INFIELD-OUTFIELD SYSTEM**. **INFIELD-OUTFIELD SYSTEM.** A system of husbandry characterized by the division of the cultivated area into **INFIELD** and **OUTFIELD**.

INNAGE. The cultivation of part of the fallow area of the common fields for a crop. **INTAKE.** A piece of land enclosed from the waste, either temporarily or permanently, for the purpose of improvement.

INTER-COMMONING. The practice of pasturing the stock of two or more manors without hindrance on a contiguous common waste which had never been appropriated to a single manor.

LAMMAS LAND. A class of commonable land, normally meadow, communally held and managed for part of the year, but thrown open to commonable animals when harvest was over. The normal day for throwing open these lands was Lammas Day (1 August) and they remained open until Lady Day (25 March). Other dates were from Old Lammas Day (12 August) to Old Lady Day (6 April).

LAND (as ploughing term). See **SELION**.

LAND MEASUREMENT. Most of the units which were used for purposes of land measurement, in times when the science of exact areal measurement was unknown, have tenurial, fiscal, and agricultural connotations, and are, therefore, not simply land measures. Thus they can only be used to reflect land area in specific instances. "The hide, the carucate, and the sulung were evidently too elastic quantities to be regarded as measurements; but they keep all through their characteristic as shares, because whatever their arithmetical variations they are always equal as against each other within the limits of one and the same *tun* at one and the same time."¹

(i) **THE ACRE.**

(a) **CUSTOMARY ACRE.** The acre was originally closely associated with ploughing technique and not with exact areal measurement. An acre was, in theory, the amount of land which a plough-team could plough in a day. Soil

¹ P. Vinogradoff, *The Growth of the Manor*, 1904, p. 152.

type, the number of oxen in the team, and local custom produced great variations in the actual size of the acre from region to region, although in some instances a certain size of acre became 'customary' or normal in an area. The customary acre differs from the statutory acre.

(b) **STATUTORY ACRE.** Statutory values of the acre were enacted in England by Acts of 5 Ed. I, 31 Ed. II, 24 Hen. VIII, and fixed the acre as a piece of land 40 poles long by 4 poles broad, or its equivalent of any shape. By the Act of 6 Geo. IV, the acre was fixed as a standard or legal measure of land in Britain. The statute acre is an area of 4,840 square yards.

(ii) **THE HIDE.** In Domesday Book, the majority of hides were reckoned at four yardlands, though there were variations. The hide was not an exact area but a complex unit having agrarian, tenurial, and fiscal implications. Some historians equate it with Bede's "land of one family," meaning the extent of land which either actually supported one family and its dependants, or for fiscal purposes was deemed capable of doing so. The hide was regularly used as a unit of assessment for the imposition of taxes. If the fiscal and agrarian functions can be distinguished in any instance, they may be termed **FISCAL HIDE** and **FIELD HIDE** respectively.

(iii) **THE YARDLAND OR VIRGATE.** The yardland is not a unit of exact land measurement, but represents a tenement of varying size measured in customary acres, and including arable with appurtenant meadow and pasture. The yardland or virgate might be subdivided into **OX-GANGS** (half of a virgate) or **FERLINGS** (quarter-virgates), both terms being primarily fiscal and areally inexact. In areas of Danish influence, different nomenclature was used. Within the wapentake (hundred) the **CARUCATE** replaced the hide, and the **BOVATE** was the equivalent of the **OX-GANG**. In south-eastern England the **SULUNG** was the equivalent of the hide, and was sub-divided into four **YOKES**.

LEVANT AND COUCHANT. The mea-

sure of the right of common appendant, consisting originally of the number of commonable animals permitted on a tenement, but which later became the number of commonable animals which could be maintained throughout the winter on the land to which the right was appendant. The rule was occasionally applied to appurtenant right.

LOT MEADOW (or **Dole Meadow**). A meadow divided into strips, the individual occupation of which is changed annually by the drawing of lots, but which is open at certain times of the year for grazing in common to all the temporary occupants of the lots.

MEADOW. Land cropped for hay.

OPEN FIELD. A confusing term, hitherto generally used to signify common arable fields (which were not always 'open'). It seems to be an over-simplification, stressing simply the contrast with the enclosed fields. The term could well be discarded, and more precise terms, e.g. 'common arable field', 'common meadow', used.

OUTFIELD. An area of common land in a township practising the infield-outfield system, part of which was periodically cultivated by the tenants of the infield. The periodicity of cultivation varied widely, but intervals of four to seven years were common.

OX-GANG. See **LAND MEASUREMENT**.

RIDGE. A piece of land thrown up by ploughing action. Some ambiguity has arisen from the use of the term in the phrase 'ridge and furrow': ridges are not invariably steep or high-backed, and are often ploughed flat.¹ The term **HIGHBACK** could be adopted to describe the steep ridges of many common-field areas.

RIDGE AND FURROW. The name often given to the regular corrugations which are evident in the surface of many fields on the present-day landscape, and are most obvious in grass-covered fields. The 'ridges' are the raised pieces of land, and the 'furrows' are the depressions which separate them. They frequently exhibit a sinuous reversed-S form, and ridge crests are often equidistant. They have been equated by some with the selions

¹ H. A. Beecham, 'A Review of Balles as Strip Boundaries in the Open Fields', A.H.R. IV, 1956, p. 29.

and furrows of the common arable fields of earlier times. But ridging of land was a common practice until the nineteenth century in areas of heavy soils, for drainage purposes, and many of the straight 'ridges' and 'furrows' (of varying amplitude) are attributable to this practice.¹

ROTATION (OF CROPS). A change or succession of crops on a given piece of land. The number of units in a crop rotation does not necessarily correspond with the number of fields over which it operates.

SELION. The basic unit of ploughing in the common arable fields, the field being marked off into parallel widths called 'lands', of 22 yards or less. The Orwins describe the process of division of the arable field into these selions or 'lands'.² The term selion is here preferred, as 'land' has now acquired a large number of meanings. The term is synonymous with other local terms—'stitch', 'stetche', 'ridge', and 'rig'. Selions may take a variety of forms, some ridged (see **RIDGE AND FURROW**), some, on areas of dry soil, flat and separated not by furrows but by balks. The term 'strip' has occasionally been used synonymously with selion, but as there is doubt as to the equation of units of tenure with units of ploughing, 'strip' (see below) is here employed in a different sense.

SEVERALTY. Individual or unshared tenure of an estate or tenement. This term is used to denote individual tenure of land (usually enclosed) as opposed to tenure of land in common; the term can also be used to describe the exclusive occupation of strips of commonable land at those times of the year when common rights cease to be exercised over them.

SHEEP WALK. (a) A stretch of unfenced pasture for sheep. (b) A right vested in the lord of a manor to feed sheep on the lands of the manor, including tenant land, at certain times of the year.

SHOTT. A block of arable land, consisting

of several or many selions, all running in the same direction, and having at either end a headland on which the plough-team could turn. This term could serve as a standard term, in preference to various words which have been used in the same sense, e.g. 'fur-long', 'flatt', 'wong', etc.

SOLE PASTURE. The grant by the owner of the soil to another, of the exclusive right, in fee simple or in copyhold, to graze animals on the soil. Both sole vesture and sole pasture could be granted to several persons as tenants in common, and the land might then appear to be land subject to common of pasture. But these are not common rights because they are exclusive or sole rights.

SOLE VESTURE. The exclusive right, granted by the owner of the soil to another, to take the produce of the soil.

STINT. The number of animals which a holder of common right is entitled to put on to common land (usually common pasture). The stint is always for a specific number of beasts with an equivalent according to the type of stock and is normally proportionate to the size of the holding. Originally the stints were allocated only to copyhold tenements. Pastures which are stinted are known as **STINTED PASTURES**. The equivalent term in the North of England is 'gate' or 'gait'—hence 'cattlegait', 'pasturegait', etc.

STRIP. The unit of tenure in one place in the common fields (arable or meadow) held by one person.³

TENEMENT. The land held by a tenant in a community, i.e. his land in the common fields and the common rights attached to it. It includes his house and garden. In the courts, this term could be used of a very wide variety of holdings, especially 'free tenements'.

TOFT. This term is frequently found to be synonymous with Croft. See **TOFT AND CROFT**.

TOFT AND CROFT. These terms are used

¹ See M. W. Beresford, 'Ridge and Furrow and the Open Fields', *Econ. Hist. Rev.*, 2nd Ser., I, 1948; also E. Kerridge, 'Ridge and Furrow and Agrarian History', *Econ. Hist. Rev.*, 2nd Ser., IV, 1951.

² C. S. and C. S. Orwin, *The Open Fields*, Oxford, 1938, p. 33.

³ I am here adopting the use of the term suggested by Miss H. M. Clark, 'Selion Size and Soil Type', *A.H.R.* VIII, 1960, p. 91.

jointly to mean a homestead with an attached piece of land.

VIRGATE. See LAND MEASUREMENT.

WARREN. Land over which the lord of the manor had exclusive rights for the hunting of small game—rabbits, etc.

WASTE. See COMMON WASTE.

WATER MEADOW. An irrigated meadow.

The floated water meadow, "technically the crowning glory of English agriculture," was an important type of water meadow, found mainly in Chalk areas, and introduced early into Wiltshire early in the seventeenth century.¹

YARDLAND. See LAND MEASUREMENT.

¹ See E. Kerridge, 'Floating of Wiltshire water meadows', *Wiltshire Archaeological Magazine*, LV, pp. 105-118.