

The Field Systems of Breckland

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I

FIELD patterns are among the more permanent and obvious features of the rural landscape. Since Parliamentary Enclosure overtook all but a few scattered remnants of the former open-field cultivation these patterns have become more stereotyped and regional variations less apparent. To the agricultural historian, however, the distribution of regional variations in former field systems is of interest, raising, as it does, the question whether similar patterns are genetically linked by a common racial origin or whether these convergences are a response to a similar natural and economic environment.

The work of Meitzen and Bloch on the Continent was matched in this country by that of Gray, which provided the first comprehensive account of the variations in English field systems.¹ Gray's interpretations of the general patterns and terminology remain valid, but since his work appeared in 1915 several decades of detailed regional studies have provided a sounder basis for comparative work on the *modus operandi* of his regional types of field systems. It was inevitable that, in the light of later knowledge, many of his conclusions and generalizations should lose their validity. Not the least important development has been the increasing recognition of the influence of environment on field patterns, in contrast to his wholly ethnic explanations.

Breckland provides an opportunity to test Gray's theories of a general East Anglian system in a limited but distinctive region. Breckland is one of the regions in Britain whose characteristic environment justifies its recognition as a 'pays', in the sense of a region that does not conform to any administrative division but which "is recognized by its inhabitants as having a unity of its own, based upon its physical and cultural endowments."² A precise delimitation of Breckland is difficult since geographical boundaries are seldom precise and there is always a transitional zone of indeterminate width between regions. This is certainly true of Breckland, which covers an area of c. 250 square miles in south-west Norfolk and north-west Suffolk, although the Fens provide a sharp demarcation of its western limits.

¹ A. Meitzen, *Siedlung und Agrarwesen der Westgermanen und Ostgermanen, der Kelten, Römer, Finnen und Slaven*, 1895; M. Bloch, *Les caractères originaux de l'histoire rurale française*, 1931, second ed. 1952; H. L. Gray, *English Field Systems*, 1915.

² E. G. Bowen, 'Le Pays de Galles', *Trans. and Papers Inst. Brit. Geogr.*, xxvi, 1959, p. 1.

Any consideration of the man-made landscape of Breckland must be undertaken with an appreciation of the natural environment and of the limitations which it imposed. A combination of porous basal chalk and a low annual rainfall, which is less than the average potential evaporation during the growing season, causes an aridity that makes the region marginal for cultivation. This situation is aggravated by geological and pedological conditions. A complex series of glacial 'tills' overlies the basal chalk, and their increasing thickness and change in lithological characteristics towards the margins of the region are reflected in the increasing fertility of the soil. The most striking feature of the drift geology of Breckland, however, is the remarkable sand pall, caused by the decalcification of the underlying chalky Boulder Clay, which attains a depth of 8-15 feet in the south-west of the region. This increases the coarse sand component of the surface soil to more than 60 per cent, which has been considered to be the limit of cultivation where the rainfall is less than 30 inches per annum.¹ Under these climatic and edaphic conditions it is not surprising to find that Breckland provides what has been called the nearest approach to steppe conditions in the British Isles.² It is against this background of extensive heaths, which characterized Breckland before the advent of the Forestry Commission and which provided an environment that was marginal for arable cultivation, that the development of the regional field systems should be appreciated.

The field systems of Breckland must be regarded initially in the context of a general East Anglian system which has raised many problems in terminology because of its apparent complexity and lack of uniformity. The pioneer work of Gray was accepted until Dr Allison resolved some of the inconsistencies in his conclusions by a closer study of the situation on the light soils of western Norfolk.³ Gray postulated a haphazard distribution of cultivation strips, of no standard size, throughout the open arable land of individual townships. As the strips of individual owners tended to be concentrated in one part of the arable land, instead of being scattered throughout fields, as in the Midland three-field system, and since there was no regular tillage plan, Gray argued that strips of winter and summer corn and fallow land lay intermingled. Sown parcels were hurdled off from the flocks until 'shack' time and grazing facilities were provided by foldcourses, or strictly defined areas of the open arable land, heath, and pastures where grazing was the sole right

¹ E. J. Russell, 'The Reclamation of Waste Land', *Jour. Royal Agric. Soc.*, LXXX, 1919, p. 117.

² W. G. Clarke, 'The Breckland Sand-Pall and its Vegetation', *Trans. Norf. and Norwich Naturalists Soc.*, x, 1914-19, p. 130.

³ K. J. Allison, 'The Sheep-Corn Husbandry of Norfolk in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries', *Agric. Hist. Rev.*, v, 1957, pp. 12-31.

of a particular flock, irrespective of the ownership or occupance of the soil. The fold also enhanced the fertility of the soil and its function is described in a seventeenth-century treatise.¹ "A foldcourse is a liberty to erect over a fold within a certain precinct of ground for ordering ye sheepe of ye fould and tathing ye land therin. And also to feede ye sheepe within ye same precinct att all sesons of the year as tyme out of mind hath bin accustomed."

The extensive employment of wattle hurdles postulated by Gray appeared unnecessarily complex and Dr Allison offered an alternative explanation. While agreeing that individual holdings were concentrated, he suggests that a series of 'shifts' or compact areas were set aside for the cultivation of a particular crop in northern and western Norfolk. Thus a three-course rotation overlay the haphazard distribution of strips and ensured a uniformity of cropping practice that was essential in order to procure a compact block of fallow for the summer grazing of the flocks. Clearly, with this arrangement, individual holdings in any one year might consist of predominantly fallow land, in which case the occupiers were compensated for the loss of productive capacity by the owners of foldcourses. As Dr Simpson acknowledges, this solution is almost certainly correct and applied to western Suffolk as well as to western Norfolk.²

Dr Allison also noticed what Gray had failed to recognize, that the light soils of western Norfolk were cultivated in some places on an infield-outfield system similar to that found in other parts of the country. It was with these conclusions in mind, some complementary and some contradictory, that the field systems of Breckland were investigated from three points of view—the visual pattern of the open fields, the cropping system, and the tenurial arrangements.

II

The main unit of arable land in Breckland was the furlong, usually known as the 'stadia' or 'quarentina'.³ These were allotted to 'precincts' or arbitrarily defined areas of the open field that were commonly bounded by highways or

¹ British Museum (=BM) Add. MS. 27,403 (undated, seventeenth century).

² A. Simpson, 'The East Anglian Foldcourse: Some Queries', *Agric. Hist. Rev.*, vi, 1958, pp. 87-96.

³ The earliest references to 'quarentinae' in Breckland that have been discovered were at Herringswell in 1304.—E. G. C. Livett, 'Some fourteenth-century documents relating to Herringswell, Suffolk', *East Ang. Notes and Queries*, II, New Series, 1903-4, pp. 121-4; and at Merton in 1308.—MSS. in possession of Lord Walsingham at Merton Hall, Norfolk (=Merton MSS.). Some idea of the size quarentinae might attain is given by a report that men ploughed straight for 12 furlongs at Northwold during the Middle Ages, mentioned by Sir Philip Shippam in 1671, *Norf. Arch.*, xxii, 1929, p. 176.

other salient topographical features. These primary and secondary subdivisions provided a guide to the location of strips and were not equivalent to the Midland field and furlong since they varied considerably in size, they referred to arable and pasture alike, and they had no significance for the cultivation of the land. Where the term 'field' occurred it was generally synonymous with a furlong. Thus, although fields and precincts coincided in 'Estfyld' at Icklingham in 1459 and in 'Westfyld' and 'Estfyld' at Narford in 1473, the 40 fields at Mildenhall in 1618 and the 10 fields at Croxton in 1327 were clearly equivalent to furlongs.¹ Some surveys, such as those of Tostock in 1494 and Sturston in 1597, base the primary subdivision of the open fields on 'quarentinae'² and an interesting revelation of the comparative unimportance of fields in Breckland is afforded by a comparison of two surveys of Sporle with Palgrave. In 1598 there were two fields in this township, but by the early seventeenth century the same furlongs were allotted to four separate fields.³

The 'quarentinae' were divided into 'pecia', which were more variable in size than the Midland 'seliones' but which averaged three roods at Merton in the fourteenth century.⁴ Extreme fragmentation of the land is confirmed by the 1,826 'pecia' that were scattered through the 18 furlongs of Wangford in 1542 and the 10 furlongs at Methwold in 1545, which contained more than 2,500 'pecia'.⁵

Presentments before the manorial court of Icklingham in the seventeenth century for ploughing up 'meer baulks' indicate the presence of ancient boundaries between land parcels, while the larger 'meeres' that were mentioned at Methwold in 1595 served both as locational features and as access paths.⁶ Together with the banks, ditches, and 'doles' that demarcated property, precinct, manorial, and township boundaries in Breckland, these 'meeres' must have been conspicuous features in the barren and open landscape of Breckland during the Middle Ages.

In appearance, therefore, the open fields of Breckland were similar to those of the rest of East Anglia, as described by Gray, and this pattern tended to remain constant throughout the Middle Ages, for there was little pre-Parliamentary enclosure in this region, in contrast to the claylands of central

¹ West Suffolk Record Office, Bury St Edmund's (=WSRO), MS. E3/10/9.9; Norwich Public Library (=NPL) MS. 11,353; Public Record Office (=PRO) MS. DL 43/9/6/17 Jas. 1; BM. Add. MS. 34,560, ff. 35 et seq.

² WSRO. MS. 645/2; PRO. MS. E 123/26, ff. 319-22.

³ NPL. MSS. 20,876 and 20,877. ⁴ Merton MSS.

⁵ NPL. MS. 4071; PRO. MS. DL 43/7/29 15 Eliz.

⁶ MSS. in the possession of Lord Iveagh at Elveden Hall, Suffolk (=Elveden MSS.), Box Icklingham/F.5 and 29/G.23; PRO. MS. DL 43/7/30 35 Eliz.

Norfolk and Suffolk. Piecemeal enclosure, however, together with the preliminary processes of the consolidation of sufficient strips to justify such action and the eradication of intervening grass baulks, was not entirely unknown in Breckland during this period. Consolidation took place by private exchange or purchase, but, as the inclusion of 14 strips within one close of arable land at Tostock in 1561 indicates, it was not necessarily a preliminary to enclosure.¹ The destruction of intervening baulks is indicated by the numerous references to "two or three strips now plowed together" or to parcels of land "sometymes dyvers pieces" that occur in many of the early surveys relating to Breckland parishes.² A notable example was the destruction of 'meres' that accompanied the desertion of Kilverstone in 1592.³ Whether enclosure concerned open arable or heathland, however, the final, and usually the most difficult, obstacle to be overcome was the removal of common grazing rights. This was usually accomplished by the preliminary conversion of common field land to 'half year' land, making it subject to common grazing only during shack time, and finally conversion to 'whole year' land that was held in severalty throughout the year. In 1432 the prior of Binham procured a deed ensuring that no parishioner would "lay claime, require, or insist upon any right of Commonye" over his lands in Swaffham,⁴ but even when common rights had been abolished enclosure was not necessarily ensured. In 1285 200 acres of heathland were removed from the common grazing of Kilverstone, and the townsmen of Kenninghall in 1616 purchased the lord's sheepwalk "and so made their lands whole year lands"—but in neither case did permanent enclosure result.⁵ The main reason for the slow pace of piecemeal enclosure in Breckland was the opposition of manorial lords, usually the main foldcourse owners, who resented any encroachment on their grazing rights. Sir William de Gray gave licence to one of his tenants at Merton in 1630 "to inclose another little pightle from the shack of my sheep,"⁶ but such consent was rare, and frequent presentments, fines, and verdicts in manorial courts that "no manne owght to inclose eny gronnde in purlui of the lords shepys course"⁷ reveal the general opposition to this practice.

It is clear, however, that enclosure, although impeded, was not prevented by the opposition of landlords. In 1630 several enclosures were permitted at Swaffham "provided they allow the lord's sheep in during shack time"⁸ and

¹ WSRO. MS. 553/39.

² e.g., Kennett and Kentford, WSRO. MS. 1563, and Eriswell, Elveden MS. 32/K.120.

³ PRO. MS. E 134/35 Eliz./24 East. ⁴ NPL. MS. 9524.

⁵ F. Blomefield, *A Topographical History of Norfolk*, 10 vols., 1739, I, p. 543 and p. 220.

⁶ Merton MS. ⁷ BM. Add. MS. 34,689. ⁸ NPL. MS. 24,072.

complete enclosure must have been facilitated by this preliminary conversion to half-year land. That enclosure did take place within the open fields of Breckland is indicated by references to "terras inclusas" among tenurial documents.¹ These closes were usually less than 5 acres in extent, but at Thetford, in 1549, 120 acres were described as "duas pec. inclusas de terra."² The mention of crofts within the open field, as at Fornham in the fifteenth century and at Methwold in 1575,³ is a further indication of the gradual progress of piecemeal enclosure, and by the early seventeenth century arable closes were a feature of many Breckland townships. The demesne land at Eriswell in 1652 included six arable closes of from 20 to 50 acres in extent and the lord of Ixworth in 1627 possessed 123 acres "inclosed in ye feeld" and 221 acres "lying open in ye feeld."⁴

Piecemeal enclosure, together with consolidation and the abolition of common rights, continued in Breckland throughout the eighteenth century. Thus, while part of the demesne holdings at Eriswell in 1768 comprised scattered strips, there were also 10 compact blocks of from 20 to 90 acres each in extent, while at Elveden, in 1706, 88 acres of glebe land "in above six score pieces" were exchanged for two contiguous parcels of 44 acres each.⁵ Doubtless the process of final enclosure was similar to that described by Kent: "Wherever a person can get four or five acres together, he plants a white thorn hedge round it . . . which is consented to by a kind of general courtesy from one neighbor to another."⁶

Pre-Parliamentary enclosure in Breckland, however, was the exception rather than the rule, and the examples cited above are but isolated instances. By the end of the eighteenth century the general distribution of land holdings in Breckland was little altered from the pattern that had prevailed during the Middle Ages. At Lakenheath in 1774 one holding was distributed between the three open 'fields' in a ratio of 117:126:127, and a complaint was filed there in 1813 that the greater part of one estate lay "in open lands, in very small parcels scattered throughout the parish."⁷ Many authorities have made the mistake of ignoring the retarded development of the Breckland landscape by including the region within their generalizations concerning the whole or part of Norfolk and Suffolk. Tusser referred to Suffolk as a

¹ e.g., Great Hockham in 1599, NPL. MS. 18,713.

² Elveden MS., unpublished collection for a history of Elveden by the Rev. George Burton (=EHC, 1740).

³ BM. Add. MS. 34,689; PRO. MS. DL 43/7/29 15 Eliz.

⁴ PRO. MS. DL 43/7/29, 15 Eliz.; BM. Harl. MS. 368, f. 171.

⁵ Elveden MSS. 24/J.16 and 29/M.30.

⁶ N. Kent, *A General View of the Agriculture of Norfolk*, 1796, p. 22.

⁷ Elveden MSS. 69/O.71 and 9/C.24.

"typical enclosed county" and J. Scrutton claimed that enclosures in that county "seem to have been completed in the sixteenth century, if not earlier."¹ Dr Thirsk has recently expressed the opinion that by 1760 the bulk of unenclosed land in Suffolk was waste and common, while both Slater and Gray, referring to Norfolk, stated that Enclosure Awards after 1750 show little remaining arable.²

As Dr Allison has shown, the 'Good Sand' region to the north of Breckland was largely enclosed during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, but this generalization cannot be extended to include all the light soils of western Norfolk. Blomefield recognized that the half of Guiltcross Hundred towards Thetford was "sandy and open" while the other half was completely enclosed by 1736, and W. E. Tate came nearer the truth of the situation in Breckland in his statement that, of 54 West Suffolk Enclosure Awards, at least 43 related to the enclosure of open arable land, compared with 6 out of 30 East Suffolk Enclosure Awards.³ Arthur Young remarked that Suffolk must be one of the earliest enclosed counties but that there were some large tracts that were still open.⁴ Most of these must have lain within Breckland. Thus, by the end of the eighteenth century, Breckland provided a greater contrast to the surrounding country than it had at any previous date. De la Rochefoucauld, leaving "the immense stretches of fallow land" in Breckland, found that, north of Swaffham, "all the fields are enclosed and well cultivated."⁵ In central Breckland, where the economy was based on the folding of sheep over the open arable and heathland, the medieval pattern of open fields was emphasized by the strict maintenance of baulk-lined strips.⁶ The existence of a cattle-rearing economy in central Suffolk is reflected in the enclosed pastures of Bardwell and Badwell Ash on the borders of Breckland, where two farms of over 200 acres each were entirely enclosed by 1730 except for two small pieces "which lye in an open field a great way from the rest of ye estate."⁷

¹ Tusser, 'Comparison between Champion County and Several' from *Five Hundred Points of Good Husbandrie*, ed. Mavor, 1812, p. 212; J. Scrutton, *Commons and Common Fields*, 1887, p. 285.

² J. Thirsk and J. Imray, *Suffolk Farming in the Nineteenth Century*, Suffolk Record Society, 1, 1958, p. 20; G. Slater, *The English Peasantry and the Enclosure of the Common Fields*, 1907, pp. 213-14.

³ W. E. Tate, 'A Handlist of Suffolk Enclosure Awards', *Proc. Suffolk Inst. of Arch.*, xxv, 1951.

⁴ A. Young, *A General View of the Agriculture of Suffolk*, 1804, p. 38.

⁵ F. de la Rochefoucauld, *A Frenchman in England*, 1784, being a translation by S. C. Roberts, 1933, p. 217.

⁶ A Court Leet verdict at Icklingham as late as 1793 ordered that "all Meer Baulks which have been plowed up shall be laid down again."—Elveden MS. Icklingham/F.30.

⁷ WSRO. MS. E3/10/10.5.

The first Enclosure Award relating to open arable land in Breckland was that for Hilborough in 1768.¹ By 1801 only 19 Breckland parishes had been enclosed, involving just over 40,000 acres, or less than 25 per cent of the total area.² The main bulk of enclosure in Breckland occurred between 1800 and 1817, when 26 Acts were passed, compared with the 19 Acts before and the 6 Acts after this period. This concentration can be ascribed to the economic conditions that prevailed during the Napoleonic Wars when the improvement of arable land was at a premium. Through the widespread enclosure of wastes, commons, and open fields at this time more land was brought into cultivation, and new, isolated farmhouses appeared in Breckland with such contemporary names as Waterloo Farm and St Helena's Farm.³ By 1820 the post-war depression in agriculture had set in and the tide of Parliamentary Enclosure was ebbing. The Act for Larling in 1816 was the only one for Norfolk in that year, and the 4 Acts passed for Breckland parishes after this date were all subsequent to the General Enclosure Act of 1845.

A total of 114,471 acres were dealt with by 49 Parliamentary Enclosure Awards in Breckland. They seldom stated the exact area enclosed, however, but detailed the total area of the parish concerned in order to obviate any outstanding claims for common grazing over land that had already been enclosed. Thus, at Northwold, 550 of the 4,500 acres that were allotted were described as "Ancient Inclosures," as were 643 of the 5,647 acres allotted at Eriswell. However, the small amount of pre-Parliamentary Enclosure in Breckland ensured that the area affected by the majority of these Acts approximated to the total area of the parish, and it is noticeable that the parishes where this approximation was closest, and therefore where pre-Parliamentary Enclosure had been least effective, all lay in central Breckland.⁴ It was common for both open arable land and heathland to be included within the terms of reference of Breckland Enclosure Awards, in contrast to East Suffolk. According to W. E. Tate, 56 Suffolk Acts prior to 1801 referred both to open arable and heathland, while 36 related to common and heathland alone, the former being commonest in West Suffolk and the latter in East Suffolk. Nevertheless, as late as 1843, there were at least 8,000 acres of commons still remaining within 13 parishes of central Breckland.⁵

¹ All Enclosure Awards mentioned are kept by the Clerk of the Peace, Norwich.

² In England as a whole 2,142 of the total 3,996 Enclosure Acts before 1835 were passed before 1800.

³ 1½ miles south-east of Stanford and 1 mile north-east of Mildenhall.

⁴ Gooderstone, Bridgham, Larling, and Thetford all had over 95 per cent of their land allotted by their respective Enclosure Awards, while less than 40 per cent of the marginal parishes of Coney Weston, Barnham, Northwold, and Hockham were affected.

⁵ BM. State Papers, Reports and Accounts, XLVIII, p. 467.

Also, although enclosure was a major formative influence in the Breckland landscape, the report of the Commissioners for Eriswell in 1800 that it was "not necessary to make fences, only to lay the Common Fields into Brecks, without Fences," besides reflecting the practical difficulties of enclosing these light soils, also suggests that the visible effects of the process were less obvious in Breckland than elsewhere.¹

III

Although the pattern of open-field cultivation in Breckland was similar to that described by Gray for East Anglia as a whole, the management of these lands revealed distinctive local characteristics. Dr Allison described the 'shift' system of cultivation and showed it to be the only method compatible with the operation of foldcourses. Also, by varying the number of shifts, a greater flexibility in the cultivation of the land was permitted, so that a less exhausting rotation than that of two crops and a fallow might be adopted. A shift system was practised in Breckland at least as early as 1338, when 8 shifts existed at Thetford.² The court order at Ingham in the fifteenth century that "all tennts and Inhabytants within the said manor owght to forbere the werkyng of ther lande eny yere where the lords course or fould shall chance to be the same yere" is indicative of a similar system, for clearly such land would then lie within a fallow shift.³ Notes appended in the seventeenth century to a terrier of Wangford taken in 1542 detail:

"Brakie fields were sown in A.D. 1643, which doth containe parts of Thankles furlonge, Middlebank furlonge, Downbanckes, Tanfield furlonge, and Grangemere furlonge. 419 acres.

"Whitefields were sown in A.D. 1644, which doth contayne other part of Thankles furlonge, part of Middleweysty, Cowpit, Downtale, and Garling furlonges. 407 acres.

"Sandys Shifte sowne in A.D. 1645, which doth conteyne Sleane furlonge, Garling furlonge, Wronglond, Longwronglond, and Middleweysty."⁴

Clearly these notes refer to shifts in the common field.⁵ The fact that different dates were decreed by Court Leet verdicts for the entry of grazing animals into the rye and barley stubbles also indicates that these crops were sown in different shifts, otherwise the application of grazing rights would have been

¹ Elveden MS. 39/K.109.

² NPL. MS. 121, unpublished account by W. G. Clarke of the Thetford district.

³ BM. Add. MS. 34,689. ⁴ NPL. MS. 4071.

⁵ Shifts were also mentioned at Rushford, Ixworth, Stanford, Harling, Methwold, Elveden, and Mundford in the period 1550-1670, NPL. MSS. 121 and 9995, Elveden MS. EHC, 1740, Hist. MSS. Comm. Rept., 1221, BM. Harl. MS. 368, fo. 171, PRO. MS. DL 43/7/29.

impracticable.¹ Shifts clearly represented a cropping system which was independent of quarentinae limits, for Thankles, Garling, and Middleweysty furlongs lay within two separate shifts at Wangford in 1643–1645, while at Fornham in the fifteenth century 'Karledon' field contained 16 acres of rye and 56 acres of wheat and probably included parts of two separate shifts.²

The enumeration of the precincts of most Breckland townships in multiples of three³ indicates that a three-course rotation was common, but the intensity of cropping was adapted to local conditions, as is shown by a survey of Elveden in 1616.⁴ "The six shiftes and felde of Elden . . . are used to be tyllid and eared as follows, vid; every year one of the said Feldes newly broken up and sowne with wynter corn and is called one year land, and the same felde the next year shall be sowne with somer corn and is then called two year land and the next year shall be broken up one other felde for wynter corne and pte of the said two year land shall also be sowne a third year and is then called three year land, and then it shall lye lay until all the felde have been sowne in the like fashion and so every year one feld is newly broken up and beene always in tylthe the two felde and part of the third feld and there are always three felde in laye londe and part of the fourthe, upon which laye felde the Foldcourse have their contynuall feed and have been anciently accustomed." Little more than one-third of the arable land of Elveden was cultivated, which supports the contention that most of the arable land in Breckland lay fallow during the later Middle Ages.

Throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries Breckland farms continued to be let "according as the shifts of the fields and enclosures shall then fall in course"⁵ and details of shifts at Elveden in 1750 and at West Wretham in 1741 were little altered from those prevailing in the seventeenth century.⁶ Even where consolidation of ownership had taken place, the same system of cultivation was practised on compact farm units. Rushford Farm was divided into 5 equal shifts held in severalty in 1730, as was Merton in 1775.⁷ Nor did consolidation necessarily result in any intensification of cropping, for at Tottington, in 1833, one tenant was required "to lay out all the

¹ In 1699 the entry date for the rye stubble was September 5th, and September 29th for the barley stubble.—Elveden MS. 29/K.53.

² NPL. MS. 4071; BM. Add. MS. 34,689.

³ Eccles had 3 fields in 1586, NPL. MS. 4079; Wangford had 18 stadia in 1542, NPL. MS. 4079; Sporle with Palgrave had 3 fields in 1598, NPL. MS. 20,877; Brandon had 6 fields in 1584, WSRO. MS. E13/11; Carbrooke had 6 fields in 1549, NPL. MS. 6689; and Wilton had 9 fields in 1635, NPL. MS. 18,262.

⁴ Elveden MS. EHC, 1740.

⁵ e.g., Timworth in 1800, WSRO. MS. E3/10/18.15.

⁶ Elveden MS. EHC, 1740; NPL. MS. 18,019.

⁷ WSRO. MS. 613/292; Merton MSS.

arable land into five equal parts, not more than two parts to be corn grain or pulse in any one year."¹ However, although the traditional method of farming by shifts remained constant in Breckland, there is some indication of the general expansion of land under the plough in the eighteenth century. Thus the six shifts of Elveden covered 1,980 acres in 1616 and 2,307 acres in 1750, while Quanwater and Crannow Fields measured 34 and 118 acres at Eriswell in 1652, while their respective areas in 1818 were 96 and 257 acres.²

Besides the shift system of agriculture, a further regional characteristic of Breckland field systems was the existence of a form of infield-outfield system that has long been recognized as a method of cultivating marginal land. Gray's theory that this system was of 'Celtic' origin has been disproved and it is now considered that some duality in cropping practice was the natural result of the change from a shifting to a permanent agriculture.³ Dr Allison, however, considered that the infield-outfield system on the light soils of western Norfolk was a comparatively late development. The original field system prevailed here until the seventeenth century, although modified to some extent during the sixteenth century by the cultivation of small heathland intakes after the flocks had been folded on them. Eventually these temporary intakes were enclosed as brecks and tilled in regular rotation until, together with the heathland, they were finally enclosed as a periodically tilled outfield and the open arable land was enclosed as a permanently tilled infield, partly as a result of the abuse of customary cropping practices, which made the operation of foldcourses increasingly difficult, but mainly as an attempt to increase crop production. Dr Simpson, however, suggested that the cultivation of heathland intakes beyond the open field had been known before the sixteenth century and, in fact, "as long as there had been flocks to make periodic cropping possible."⁴

Although many parallels can be drawn with the infield-outfield system of other parts of the country, there is evidence that the Breckland system contained factors that have not been recognized elsewhere and that this region cannot be included within generalizations made about the light soils of Nor-

¹ Merton MSS.

² Elveden MSS. EHC, 1740; 22/H.13; and 27/J.15. Allowance must be made for the generalization of the earlier measurements owing to the imperfection of contemporary surveying methods and also to discrepancies arising from the possible use of a local acre. Thus, at Mundford in 1769, 87½ 'commonfield' acres = 65½ statute acres.—NPL. MS. 20,584.

³ H. Uhlig, 'Old Settlement and Field Structures, a Common Heritage in the Cultural Landscape of Western and Central Europe', *XIXth Internat. Geog. Cong.*, Symposium on *The Morphogenesis of the Agrarian Cultural Landscape*, Stockholm, 1960, p. 9. This work includes a comprehensive bibliography on the origin of regional field systems.

⁴ *Op. cit.*, p. 94.

folk. Elsewhere a dual division of the arable land into an intensively cropped infield and periodically tilled outfield 'intakes' from the waste has been recognized, but in Breckland it is possible to recognize a tripartite division of the same area.¹ This system, which might be called the infield-outfield-breck system, is based on the dual rotational practice in the cropping of certain shifts within the open field, resulting in an infield and an outfield, while the 'outfield', as recognized elsewhere, is represented by 'brecks' taken in from the heath. In other words the 'infield' is represented in Breckland by an infield and an outfield and the 'outfield' by brecks. This duality of cropping within the open field is evident at Croxton in 1327, where 'Suthfyld' and 'Hangedeles' field contained quarentinae that were designated both as 'Infeldlond' and 'Utfeldlond', while Stanford in 1560 contained 6 'Outfield Shifts', that were cropped in rotation with not more than two successive crops off each, and 4 'Infield Shifts', one of which was left fallow each year.² Furthermore, the 'Shift Landes' that were detailed at Wangford in 1625 were cultivated only once in a minimum of three years, and as they were said to abut the 'High Fildes', they probably represented the outfield land.³ Apart from this direct evidence, there are further indications of two different rotations in the open fields of Breckland prior to the sixteenth century. The correlation of 'infield' and 'every year land' is too facile since the latter may refer merely to land that has been removed from shackle rights.⁴ However, land recorded in 'Leymere Everyerelond' and 'Crosathe Way Every Yeare Feild' at Icklingham in 1459 were definitely recorded as infield land in 1586, so that this assumption may be valid in this case.⁵ A valuation of this township in 1556, which valued 'land' at 1s. per acre and 'Every Yeare Land' at 5s. 4d. per acre, also suggests a duality in the cropping arrangements of the open field.⁶ The distinctiveness of Breckland field systems is further exemplified by plotting references to 'infield' and 'outfield' parcels found in seventeenth-century conveyances of land at Icklingham on a contemporary manorial map.⁷ It should have been possible to plot a rough boundary between the infield and the outfield, but in practice it appeared that this boun-

¹ Where variations in terminology occur, they have been correlated as far as possible with this regional model. Thus, shifts in the open field are sometimes known as 'brecks' and heath-land intakes as 'outfield land'.

² BM. Add. MS. 34,560, ff. 35 et seq.; Townshend MS., Garsett House, Norwich, quoted by A. Simpson, *op. cit.*, p. 94. ³ NPL. MS. 4071.

⁴ The Enclosure Act for Worlingham in 1799 is entitled "An Act for dividing and allotting the Whole Year or Every Year Land" and the Act for Icklingham in 1813 mentions "Infield or Every Year Land."

⁵ WSRO. MS. E 3/10/G.4; Elveden MS. Icklingham/G.10.

⁶ WSRO. MS. E 3/10/G.2.

⁷ Elveden MS. Icklingham/F.340.

dary was an arbitrary one that disregarded quarentinae limits and which may even have fluctuated, since the same land parcels fall into both categories at different dates. Nor was the infield land at Icklingham necessarily that immediately surrounding the village and the outfield that farthest away, since in 1702 and 1813 the former was recorded over half a mile from the village, and in 1786 the latter appeared immediately west of the village street.¹ It appears, therefore, that these connotations applied solely to the intensity with which the land was cultivated, regardless of its location.

One example of the infield-outfield system has been recognized in Breckland at West Wretham where, in 1611, there were "... belonging to the said lords of the manor of West Wretham seven Breaks or Shifts of arable lands called Outfield which are folded in course every year with the Flock of Ewes there, and they contain in all about Four Hundred Acres of land."² These outfield brecks appear to be intakes from the heath, but their alternative designation suggests that they were, in fact, equivalent to the outfield shifts noted at Icklingham, Stanford, and Wangford, since they represent the major part of the arable land and were cropped in rotation. If they had been heathland intakes, the original arable land of West Wretham would have been limited to 116 acres. Since the 1,842 strips of arable land at Wangford in 1542 covered over 800 acres,³ this discrepancy between townships similar in size is too obvious to be overlooked. It may be explained, however, by regarding the 400 acres of brecks at West Wretham as outfield shifts in which the engrossing of smallholders' strips had progressed to the extent where demesne land dominated nearly the whole of the outfield. As would be expected, less consolidation of ownership had taken place in the inherently more fertile infield. The origin of the West Wretham system, however, cannot be finally elucidated until further evidence is forthcoming for tenurial arrangements prior to 1600, but the fact that one of the brecks was "formerly called Grenegate furlong" may be indicative of an earlier system.

Apart from the evidence of two different rotations in the open field, the existence of the third element, that of brecks, is indicated by such field names as 'Rytesbreche' and 'Le Breche' at Fornham in the fifteenth century, while 43 acres were "inclosed by hege and dyche next Brakehyll" at Carbrooke in 1549 and a 'brake piece' called 'Sandelpitte next the comon pasture' was mentioned at Great Barton in 1566.⁴ The process of such reclamation was

¹ Elveden MSS. Icklingham/C.28, Icklingham/G.77, Icklingham/G.10.

² NPL. MS. 10,687, see J. Saltmarsh and H. C. Darby, 'The Infield-Outfield System on a Norfolk Manor', *Econ. Hist.*, III, 1935, pp. 30-44.

³ NPL. MS. 4071.

⁴ BM. Add. MS. 34,689; NPL. MS. 21,195; WRSO. MS. E 18/154/1.

recorded at Kilverstone in 1592, where evidence was given that one farmer "some fifty yeres ago did plowe upp and sowe with corne xii acres or ther aboute of heth groune adjoyning a fyld called Smythfyld," while a 'Newe Fyelde' was "newe plowed into the shepecourse and warren" at Methwold in 1575.¹ Little reclamation of heathland occurred in Breckland during the Middle Ages, however, largely because of the opposition to "plowing the lords hethe"² that prevailed under manorial custom, and for this reason it is likely that the 400 acres of Brakes at West Wretham and the 800 acres in 19 brecks at East Wretham in the seventeenth century³ were outfield shifts in the original arable land and that true brecks were comparatively small in extent during this period.

Evidence for the field systems of Breckland becomes more conclusive for the eighteenth century, and it is clear that the cultivation of infield and outfield shifts by rotations of differing intensity still persisted. Grass layers, however, had replaced fallow shifts, and this resulted in further local differences—as at Icklingham in 1730, where "such as is Barley land is to be plowed and sowed three years in succession then lay the same two years for summer tilling, Rye and Oats land to take two crops only and then lay the same three years."⁴ At Merton in 1775 recently reclaimed land was divided into five shifts and the 'old arable' into four shifts, while the infield lands at West Tofts, Roudham, and Barnham were cropped on five-course and the outfields on six-course rotations at the end of the eighteenth century—the difference in each case representing a higher proportion of seeds.⁵ Even enclosure did not obscure the regional cropping arrangements of Breckland, for dual rotations were imposed by covenanted leases on enclosed farms. Thus the 'demised land' at Icklingham in 1854 was cropped on a four-course rotation, while only one-sixth of the 'outshift' land was to be cropped in any one year.⁶

Although the distinction between infield and outfield land remained at the end of the eighteenth century, the brecks had developed from being mere appendages to the remainder of the open-field land until in some cases they exceeded it in area. Thus East Hall Farm at Mundford in 1771 contained 23 acres of enclosed infield land, 136 acres of dispersed outfield land, and 315 acres of 'brake' land, while Hilborough in 1769 contained 581 acres of infield

¹ PRO. MS. E 134/35 Eliz/24 East; PRO. MS. DL 43/7/29 15 Eliz.

² e.g., at Icklingham in 1573, Elveden MS. Icklingham/F.19.

³ NPL. MS. 10,071.

⁴ WSRO. MS. E 3/10/9.22. A similar adaptation to local soil conditions may have occurred at Sturston in 1561 and Kilverstone in 1591, where 'barley lands' are distinguished from the remaining arable.—WSRO. MS. E 3/10/9.22, and PRO. MS. E 134/35 Eliz/East. 24.

⁵ Merton MSS.; WSRO. MS. E 7/10/9; NPL. MS. 6722; WSRO. MS. 654/2.

⁶ Elveden MS. Icklingham/J.83.

land, 626 acres of outfield, and 940 acres of "brakes and old warren."¹ At Kentford in 1767 320 acres of heathland were described as "newly inclosed" or "heath broke up," while 7 brecks of 25 to 100 acres each were formed at Icklingham between 1716 and 1764.² Between 1795 and 1840 the economic conditions that prevailed during the Napoleonic Wars resulted in the reclamation of c. 20 per cent of the existing Breckland heathland.³ It is likely, however, that this formation of new brecks merely represented the extension of the area over which transient cultivation was practised, and it is significant that, at a time of relative prosperity, the Tithe Surveyors should record the utilization of 11 of the 16 brecks at Elveden, or 593 of the total 815 acres, as 'heathland'. Therefore, although the area of brecks had increased considerably, the relative intensity of cultivation of the various components of Breckland field systems had changed little since 1600.⁴ This is suggested by the values attached to the various categories of land at Mundford in 1769, where infield land was rated at 3s. to 8s. per acre and outfield land at 2s. to 2s. 6d. per acre, little more than the open heathland at 2s. per acre.⁵ The intensity of cultivation of the outfield probably varied with soil conditions and individual management, but the estate of the duke of Grafton near Thetford was said "to resemble most of the farms in this neighbourhood . . . the more valuable and fruitful parts have been made so at the expense of a thorough coat of clay . . . and admit of the 3-shift husbandry, while the rest is quite open and lies 4 or 5 years before it comes again under the plough."⁶

While the comparative intensity of cropping of Breckland infields and outfields remained fairly static prior to enclosure, there is some evidence that more intensive farming in the late eighteenth century led to the enclosure of infield land and the transformation of some of the outfield into infield. These processes are exemplified by the details of Hilborough and Barnham given below.⁷ The enclosure of the infield had been completed at Barnham and its progress was marked at Hilborough by the number of half-year and whole-year closes. If these are included within the area of infield land, this is dis-

¹ NPL. SM. 18,262; Hilborough Enclosure Award.

² WSRO. MS. 339/6; WRSO. MS. E 3/10/10.

³ Obtained by comparing W. Faden's maps of Norfolk and Suffolk, 1783 and 1795, with the Tithe Survey of 1837-1846 of Breckland parishes.

⁴ Some idea of the size brecks attained is given by the following details taken from the Tithe Awards; Elveden—Marman's Grave Breck 145 acres, West Gooch Breck 176 acres; Bodney—Frisky Breck 272 acres, Old Part of Warren 341 acres; Weeting—Lodge Breck 123 acres, Glebe Breck 104 acres.

⁵ NPL. MS. 20,584.

⁶ *Annals of Agriculture*, VII, 1786, p. 1.

⁷ A. Young, *op. cit.*, 1804, p. 332; Hilborough Enclosure Award.

	BARNHAM	HILBOROUGH
	<i>acres</i>	<i>acres</i>
Infield Arable Land	381	581
Outfield Arable Land	2,626	626
Breck or Old Warren	—	940
Half Year Closes	—	186
Whole Year Closes	—	237
Heath and Sheepwalk	1,735	420

proportionately high in comparison with the outfield land, but it may be accounted for by an encroachment of the former into the latter area by an extension of the land that was more intensively cultivated—a process of expansion that is further reflected in the extension of outfield shifts into the heathland. A similar process is evident at Mundford in 1772, where one estate contained 218 acres of infield land, 199 acres of outfield land, and 157 acres of brecks.¹ Further evidence for more intensive cropping in Breckland during the eighteenth century emerges from a comparison of cropping arrangements at Elveden in 1616 and in 1725.² In 1616 the ratio of cropped to fallow land was $2\frac{1}{2} : 3\frac{1}{2}$, but by 1725 the arable land had been reorganized into 5 shifts in which corn and turnip crops dominated layers by 3 : 2.

The infield-outfield-breck system in Breckland throws some light on the development of field systems in general. Dr Uhlig has suggested that a settled agricultural community develops by the selection of the best land over which shifting cultivation was formerly practised. This becomes the permanently cultivated and manured infield, while the remainder of each township's land continues as a periodically cultivated outfield. A similar process is recognizable in Breckland. A single infrequent rotation was still practised over all the arable land at Elveden in 1616 and at Linford in the seventeenth century, which was consequently all equivalent to outfield land and represents the survival of a practice that had disappeared elsewhere.³ In other parishes, the infield had been formed out of the outfield, and a third class of land, the brecks, was evident in some places. This tripartite division, as Dr Allison has shown, was not recognizable in the 'Good Sand' region in the seventeenth century, but further investigation may well reveal a similar genesis of the field systems there. More intensive cultivation, in response to increasing population or the increasing profitability of corn production consequent

¹ NPL. MS. 13,720.

² Elveden MS. EHC, 1740.

³ Elveden MS. EHC, 1740. This system is paralleled by current practice in the Hebrides, where the sandy 'machair' soils are too unstable for permanent tillage and can only support 'outfield' crop rotations.

upon improved facilities for inter-regional trade, would be reflected in the first instance not in the formation of new brecks but in the spread of infield rotations into the outfield. By the early seventeenth century a more intensive infield rotation had spread over all the open fields of the 'Good Sand' region, and no duality in the cropping arrangement of the open field was evident; hence the brecks became recognized as the outfield. In Breckland, however, there was no marked expansion of population in the Middle Ages and therefore no real incentive to intensify cultivation, which was, in any case, retarded by the poverty of the outfield soils. The boundary between the infield and the outfield fluctuated according to the current demand for crop production, and by the seventeenth century there were signs that the more favoured villages were approaching the situation in the 'Good Sand' region, where all the arable land was cultivated on a rotation of two crops and a fallow. The process by which the original nucleus of infield land absorbed the outfield, which in turn absorbed the heathland, has already been described, and it is fortunate that the development of the Breckland field systems, which may represent a genetic model with a wider application, was retarded until documents were sufficiently abundant to make clear their main features.

A definite infield-outfield system remained in the central parishes of Breckland until their final enclosure, which instead of obliterating, merely fossilized their distinctive pattern. Thus, at Wereham and Caldecote, the privately enclosed infield is represented by small irregular fields, the outfield is divided into the large, regular enclosures left by the Parliamentary Surveyors, and the brecks beyond are, even today, separated from the open heath only by a grass baulk or conifer shelter belt.

IV

Gray, in his reconstruction of an East Anglian field system, considered that "among such haphazard fields and precincts we should not expect to find an equal distribution of the parcels of various holdings." He therefore postulated a concentration of the parcels of one holding in a certain area of the arable land of individual townships. He ascribed this concentration to an original East Anglian unit of villein tenure, the 'eriung', which was unlike either the compact Kentish 'iugum' or the scattered Midland 'virgate', but which approximated to an intermediate form.¹ A consolidated unit of tenure arose from the formation of a large number of petty manors and small freeholders that followed the Danish influx.² 'Gavelkind', or partible inheritance,

¹ The 'eriung' was known after the fourteenth century as the 'tenementum' or the 'plena terra'.

² In this respect he agreed with F. W. Maitland, *Domesday Book and Beyond*, 1907, pp. 307-8.

caused a disintegration of these units, but this process was interrupted by the superimposition of a Norman manorial system.¹ The 'eriung', therefore, neither completely consolidated nor scattered, was the result of arrested development at some stage in the decay of an earlier compact unit.

Gray's opinion, however, that a tendency to concentration of individual holdings was logical in a haphazard field system is difficult to accept as there is no apparent reason why the removal of the definite boundaries of a three-field system should ensure this distribution. Similarly, Dr Allison's statement that "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 . . . the strips of a tenant's holdings were consequently not widely dispersed," appears to be a 'non sequitur'. Accepting that a shift system of agriculture prevailed in Breckland, it would seem more logical for one man's strips to be distributed among the various shifts so that, in any one year, he would have an adequate proportion of each crop—precisely the same justification for the wide distribution of a Midland tenant's holding.

Both Gray and Dr Allison used documents relating largely to the 'Good Sand' region, but samples taken from the larger holdings in several Breckland townships are sufficient to belie the general theory of concentration. Elveden in 1617-18 is a case in point.²

	<i>Holding</i>				<i>Area of Shift</i>
	<i>A</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>C</i>	<i>D</i>	
	<i>acres</i>	<i>acres</i>	<i>acres</i>	<i>acres</i>	<i>acres</i>
Melfield Shift	35	22	142	95	329
Ingham Shift	83	26	204	136	462
Cross Shift	78	28	204	153	481
Old Elden Shift	60	23	163	118	389
Little Pit Shift	67	13	110	79	258
Drymere Shift	53	18	151	117	379

An account contemporaneous with this survey and from the same source records that the tenants of Elveden "have many several lands lying among the said Demesne lands in each and every of the six shifts and feldes," and this was probably an original situation since it is unlikely that such a dispersion represented an intermediate stage between the concentrated 'eriung' form and the final consolidation that culminated in enclosure. That such a dispersal dates back at least to the thirteenth century is indicated by the distri-

¹ In this respect he agreed with F. Seebohm, *The English Village Community*, 1883, pp. 176-8.

² Elveden MS., EHC, 1740.

bution of the demesne holdings of the bishop of Ely at Feltwell in 1277:¹

Suthfeld	40½ acres
Portegate Feld	121 acres
Estfeld	140 acres
Mickleberedfeld	217 acres
Lowerkehilfeld	173½ acres

As in the case of cropping arrangements, it would appear that Breckland retained an earlier tenorial system for longer than on the more fertile soils to the north. In the 'Good Sand' region Dr Allison found that holdings were almost entirely concentrated by the sixteenth century, which may have misled some authorities into interpreting this situation as a reflection of original conditions. Gray found that an estate at Shropham, on the north-east margin of Breckland, was concentrated in one part of the arable land by the eighteenth century, which he considered unlikely to be a recent development as this would involve a transitional phase between an original dispersion and final enclosure. Evidence relating to Breckland, however, suggests that this is exactly what has occurred and that, as has been shown, piecemeal enclosure was preceded by the consolidation of the strips of one holding. This process, however, had not progressed far in Breckland by the eighteenth century, and the wide dispersal of the units of individual holdings evident there may represent an original system which further investigation will show to have also preceded the concentrated holdings that existed in the 'Good Sand' region in the sixteenth century.

While it was an advantage, however, to possess lands in each of the various shifts of the open field, ease of management and access provided an obvious incentive to consolidate land parcels within individual shifts and quarentinae. This process became increasingly evident in Breckland during the seventeenth century and is exemplified in the number of strips within certain quarentinae at Sporle with Palgrave in 1598 and in the early seventeenth century.²

	1598	Early 17th century
Ryvettsbite Furlonge	7 strips	3 strips
Netherparkehowefurlonge	13 „	4 „
Overparkehowefurlonge	9 „	2 „
Shortefurlonge	20 „	2 „
Foxondeale Furlonge	29 „	6 „

These details clearly indicate consolidation, a conclusion that is supported

¹ F. Blomefield, *op. cit.*, 1739, II, p. 188.

² NPL. MSS. 20,876 and 20,877.

by frequent references to "two or three strips now plow'd together" in Field Books of this period and the destruction of 'meeres' at Sturston in 1597.¹ At Methwold in 1649 the demesne arable land included 8 parcels of between 15 and 71 acres in extent, each of which were said to lie between two 'meeres'.² Eleven further parcels, however, were only 3 to 9 acres each in extent and were interspersed with land belonging to Christ's College, Cambridge, and to the Rectory, which suggests that corporate bodies were among the more conservative of landlords and delayed the process of consolidation the longest. Marshall noticed that, in the eighteenth century, glebe lands were frequently the last to be enclosed.³

It was left largely to Parliamentary Enclosure Commissioners to reorganize the tenurial arrangements of Breckland parishes, and while their task was complicated by the wide dispersal of individual holdings, it was considerably simplified by the pattern of ownership that prevailed in Breckland at the end of the eighteenth century. The whole region was dominated by a few large estates, divided into one or two tenant farms, whose size was partly the result of economic necessity on these light soils. Young found five estates in Norfolk Breckland with rentals of over £10,000 and one of over £25,000, while in Suffolk Breckland there were 4 estates with rentals of over £5,000 and 30 of over £3,000, compared with the average rental of £20-£100 on the "strong, wet loams" of the central part of the county.⁴ At the end of the eighteenth century 14 Breckland landlords owned a total of 54,637 acres in 15 central Breckland parishes, which were divided between 27 farms averaging over 2,000 acres each in extent.⁵

It was the large landowners who were responsible for Parliamentary Enclosure in Breckland, and there is no doubt that they were favoured at the expense of smallholders in the Awards. It was only in the marginal parishes that occupiers of 50-100 acre holdings held a sufficient proportion of the land to oppose the passage of an Enclosure Act, but even here, they merely delayed the final award.⁶ Comparisons between the claims delivered to the com-

¹ e.g., at Kentford in 1563, WSRO. MS. 339/8, and Norton in 1593, WSRO. MS. 553/43; PRO. MS. E 134/38/39 Eliz. Mich. 9.

² PRO. MS. DL 43/7/30 C.1.

³ W. Marshall, *Rural Economy of Norfolk*, 1787, I, p. 8.

⁴ A. Young, *A General View of the Agriculture of Norfolk*, 1804, p. 17.

⁵ From details in the works of Arthur Young, the *Annals of Agriculture*, and various estate papers.

⁶ E. G. Hunt, 'Landownership and Enclosure', *Econ. Hist. Rev.*, 2nd Series, XI, 1959, p. 56, and J. Lavrovsky, 'Parliamentary Enclosure in the County of Suffolk', *Econ. Hist. Rev.*, VII, 1937, p. 49, found that 32 per cent of Leicestershire and 51 per cent of East Suffolk were held in holdings of 5-100 acres—sufficient to delay the passage of Enclosure.

missioners and the details embodied in the awards reveals the extent to which major landowners in Breckland were favoured by enclosure. At Great Cressingham, W. J. Chute claimed for 1,114 acres and received 1,259, while three small freeholders of 251, 272, and 103 acres received 212, 199, and 67 acres respectively. Furthermore the compensation granted for rights of 'sheep-walk and shackle' also favoured the major landowners. At Roudham and East Harling 449 and 388 acres were awarded on this pretext, amounting to one-quarter and one-fifth of the sum total of the two allotments concerned. Not so extensive, but equally favourable to manorial lords, were grants made for their 'right of soil'. The unfavourable bias against commoners is reflected also in the inadequate compensation they received for the loss of common rights. Young noted that the 6 acres allotted at Northwold were subject to inundation, "the land that would have suited the commonable messuages has been allotted to the great proprietors."¹ At Bridgham, Methwold, and Croxton the poor allotments were several miles from the village. Encroachments on the waste within a period varying from 20 to 40 years prior to Enclosure were also regarded as part of the waste, so that the 'squatters' responsible for them were deprived of compensatory allotments, while manorial lords benefited from an extended right of soil. H. G. Hunt found that enclosure in Leicestershire was accompanied by a steady transfer of land from small to large landholders and there is no doubt that this also occurred in Breckland. There were 70 families at Hockham on the eve of its enclosure in 1795, but only 10 received allotments under the Award. A constant theme in the history of landownership in Breckland is the concentration of land in ever fewer hands, a tendency marked by the consolidation of holdings in the sixteenth century and the engrossing of large estates in the eighteenth. This process is exemplified by the situation at Rushford where 15 freeholders each held from 15 to 40 acres in 1242, whereas the whole parish formed only a part of one farm in 1730.² The falling population in Breckland between 1821 and 1841 was largely a result of the loss of common rights on enclosure, coupled with the effects of the agricultural distress that succeeded the Napoleonic Wars, while, as Lavrovsky concluded, the commutation of tithes led to a further diminution of the area owned by the peasantry.

V

The field systems of Breckland provide a valuable insight into the development of field systems on poor land in general. Because of their retarded de-

¹ A. Young, *op. cit.*, 1804, p. 147.

² NPL. MS. 121, unpublished account by W. G. Clarke of the Thetford district.

velopment, retaining as they did their medieval form until the advent of Parliamentary Enclosure, they enable a comparative study to be made of the conditions that may have existed in comparable regions at an earlier date. The peculiar adaptation of the infield-outfield system in Breckland is one that could only have been recognized by the detailed study of a limited and distinctive region, and the value of such local studies lies in the corroborative or contradictory evidence which they provide for the more generalized conclusions of earlier authorities.

NOTES AND COMMENTS (*continued from page 79*)

Secretary. Three members of the Committee—Professor M. W. Beresford, Mr G. E. Fussell, and Mr Alexander Hay—retired, and the meeting elected in their place Mr T. W. Fletcher, Mr W. E. Minchinton, and Miss E. H. Whetham. The chairman of the executive committee, Mr Harwood Long, presented the executive committee's report for the previous year. He explained that membership had risen from six hundred and three to six hundred and thirty-one. He also explained that during the coming months the executive committee would consider the preparation of an index for the second five volumes, and that plans were being made for an issue of a volume of reprints from the AGRICULTURAL HISTORY REVIEW along the lines of those issued by the Economic History Society. The Treasurer, in presenting his report, explained that the balance brought forward was £157 as opposed to £112 the year before, but it had been necessary to transfer £100 from reserve. He explained that the executive committee

had thought it desirable to increase the cost of single numbers of the journal to non-members from 12s. 6d. to 17s. 6d. and back numbers to members from 7s. 6d. to 12s. 6d. It was also proposed to raise the cost of advertising in the journal from £4 to £6 for a half page and from £8 to £12 for a whole page.

At the meeting of the executive committee held later in the day, Mr Harwood Long was re-elected chairman.

FUTURE CONFERENCES

The December conference of the Society will be held jointly with the Association of Agriculture at the London School of Economics on Saturday, 8 December. The main paper will be given by the President, Mr R. V. Lennard, on 'Agrarian History: Some Vistas and Pitfalls (with special reference to medieval England)'. The annual general meeting and conference will be held at St Mary's College, Durham, from Wednesday, 3 April to Friday, 5 April 1963.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

David M. Wilson, M.A., F.S.A., is assistant keeper of the department of British and Medieval Antiquities, British Museum, and author of a volume entitled *The Anglo-Saxons* (1960).

M. R. Postgate, M.A. (London), a research student at Churchill College, Cambridge, is

preparing a doctoral thesis on the field systems of Cambridgeshire.

E. L. Jones, B.A., D.Phil., a research student at Nuffield College, Oxford, has completed a thesis on high farming in the middle of the nineteenth century.