

The Tithe Files of the Mid-Nineteenth Century

By E. A. COX and B. R. DITTMER

AN introduction to the tithe surveys of the mid-nineteenth century, by H. C. Prince, appeared in this journal in 1959.¹ It described the contents of the tithe apportionments and maps and outlined their potential usefulness to the geographer, but it omitted any consideration of another class of tithe document, called the Tithe Files. As far as the writers can discover, these documents have not been exploited in any published work, though material derived from them has appeared in five unpublished London University theses in geography.² This paper proposes to describe the nature of the tithe files and to show, with particular reference to two areas—Essex and north-west Wiltshire—how they can be utilized.

THE CONTENTS OF THE TITHE FILES

A tithe file exists for every tithe district (the areal unit of each tithe survey, generally a parish), and all the tithe files are stored at the offices of the Tithe Redemption Commission, Finsbury Square, London.³ The contents of each file vary, but generally they contain "the reports of the Assistant Commissioner who conducted the various meetings in the district in connection with commutation, and the draft Award where one was made. Some of the files also contain correspondence and drafts relating to later proceedings under the Tithes Acts—for example, the exchange of glebe land, the sale of tithe barns, the apportionment and redemption of tithe rentcharge."⁴ They also throw light on the nature of tithes and exemptions from payment, enclosures,

¹ H. C. Prince, 'The Tithe Surveys of the Mid-Nineteenth Century', AHR VII, Part I, 1959, pp. 14–26.

² I.e. E. D. R. Burrell, *An Historical Geography of the Sandlings of Suffolk*, London Univ. M.Sc. thesis, 1961; J. W. Edwards, *Enclosure and Improvement in the Vale of Clwyd, 1750–1875*, London Univ. M.A. thesis, 1963; D. W. Gramolt, *The Coastal Marshes of Eastern Essex between the Seventeenth and Mid-Nineteenth Centuries*, London Univ. M.A. thesis, 1961; M. C. Naish, *The Agricultural Landscape of the Hampshire Chalklands, 1700–1840*, London Univ. M.A. thesis, 1960; M. Postgate, *Historical Geography of the Breckland, 1600–1850*, London Univ. M.A. thesis, 1961.

³ The tithe files are due to be removed to Ashridge House, Hertfordshire.

⁴ The Secretary (Tithe Redemption Commission), 'The Records of the Tithe Redemption Office', *Journal of the Society of Archivists*, 1, 1957, p. 136.

boundary disputes, the condition of the clergy and the attitude of their parishioners. But only that material relevant to a study of mid-nineteenth-century agriculture will be considered here. This is found primarily in the reports of the Assistant Commissioners.

In his report, the Assistant Commissioner was required to set down the details of the local commutation proceedings in chronological order. Usually, he began by naming the local newspaper in which the notice of the first parish meeting was advertised, and the date of its publication. Some Assistant Commissioners included more in their reports than others, but, in all reports, the essential information about the results of the meetings, the complaints or agreement of local landowners, the findings of the surveyors and valuers, and the conclusions of the Assistant Commissioners themselves, were recorded. Each Assistant Commissioner had to write hundreds of separate reports. Thus, in order to save time, and to give some kind of uniformity to the thousands of reports from all over England and Wales, questionnaires were printed, one for each tithe district. These questionnaires required only that information essential for the proper commutation of tithes; of necessity, much of this information concerned the agriculture of each district, and it is this which has proved to be of most value to the agricultural geographer. In the experience of the writers, there are two kinds of questionnaire, both of which are discussed here.

Questionnaires for tithe districts in north-west Wiltshire and North Wales, for example, contain 16 questions, 14 of which relate directly to agriculture. Table I is a copy of the first 14 questions, with answers as they were given for the north-west Wiltshire parish of Box in 1838.¹ Questions 15 and 16 concerned average composition and rates. Because the questionnaire was so short and almost completely concerned with agriculture, the Assistant Commissioner was obliged to prefix a written report on other matters connected with the local commutation, chiefly the business dealt with in the local parish meetings. Sometimes this included useful information not given in the questionnaire, such as the average yield of the chief crops grown in the district, or some comment on the markets for local farm products. In several north-west Wiltshire tithe files, the Assistant Commissioner reported on the accuracy of the acreage figures given in the tithe apportionment, stating whether they were by measurement, or just estimates. He sometimes commented on the difficulty encountered by the surveyors in defining the boundaries of a parish: Assistant Commissioner Charles Pym, for instance, wrote: "the boundary between the parishes of Hardenhuish, Chippenham, and Langley Burrell (Wiltshire), all contiguous, cannot be defined."²

¹ *Tithe File* (T.F.), Box.

² T.F., Hardenhuish.

The manner in which the questionnaire for Box (Table I) was completed was typical of most tithe districts in north-west Wiltshire, although the answer to Question 2 sometimes named the crops that constituted the usual rotation. The average rentable values of arable, pasture, and common (Questions 6, 13, and 14) were the basis of the assessment of tithe rentcharge, and, taken in conjunction with the information on soils (Questions 3 and 8), they provide a good index of the agricultural quality of land in each tithe district.

TABLE I
TITHE FILES: EXAMPLE OF THE PRINTED QUESTIONNAIRE

Sample parish: BOX

<i>Question</i>	<i>Answer</i>
1. How many acres of arable land (including under that description the land actually ploughed in the present or last season, whether sown with corn, planted with roots or fallow, but excluding seeds)?	1,692
2. What is the course of crops?	Four fields
3. What is the nature of the soil?	Stonebrash and Clay
4. What is the subsoil?	Stone . . . Clay [sic]
5. What description of timber grown in the hedgrows, or otherwise: Oak, Ash, Elm or Beech?	Elm, Ash, Oak and Beech
6. What is the fair average rentable value per acre of the arable land?	19s.
7. What is the number of acres of pasture, including seeds?	1,815
8. What is the nature of the soil?	Clay and Loam
9. What is the subsoil?	— do —
10. What description of timber?	Elm and Ash
11. What is the number of acres of Common?	217
12. Stock: Number of cows?	150
,, bullocks?	—
,, horses?	—
,, sheep?	2,200 ewes 1,500 lambs 800 tegs
13. What is the fair average rentable value of the pasture?	25s.
14. What is the fair average rentable value of the Common?	7s.

In a few north-west Wiltshire questionnaires, the Assistant Commissioner added the average rentable value of woodland. Question 12, on livestock, was concerned principally with cattle and sheep. Sometimes the numbers of dairy cows and grazing cows were separately stated, and sometimes the numbers of horses and oxen might be included. All the livestock numbers were estimates; some idea of the way in which they were calculated may be gained from the tithe file for Chippenham, Wiltshire, where one of the tithe valuers,

Benjamin Badcock, "got the number of cows he saw, and added 15 per cent for those not seen."¹

The north-west Wiltshire questionnaires suffer from the fact that they were completed by about six different Assistant Commissioners, with consequent variations in detail of the information that they wrote down. On the other hand, in his work on parishes within the Vale of Clwyd, North Wales, J. W. Edwards has found that the questionnaires were completed there by just two Assistant Commissioners.² One of these, Aneurin Owen, wrote in as much information on crops, livestock, etc. as the space on the questionnaire sheet allowed, and he suffixed this with a brief account of each tithe district, its location, relief, soils, climate, and agriculture. This procedure was consistent in all the questionnaires for which he was responsible.

Not all the tithe files contain a questionnaire. Usually, when it is missing, there is no alternative information in the file about agriculture. Yet, occasionally, the Assistant Commissioner made his own report on local agriculture, which, freed from the set format of the questionnaire, included much additional information of great value. When no early agreement was reached over tithe commutation, several additional meetings and inquiries were necessary for the Assistant Commissioner to make his compulsory Award. The minutes of these meetings have been preserved in the respective tithe files, and they contain much valuable information about individual farms, given, under cross-examination, by the farmers themselves and by land valuers. Information on this scale, apart from its intrinsic value, provides a useful check against that given for the parish, or tithe district, as a whole. This kind of evidence was given in great detail for farms in three parishes in north-west Wiltshire.³

In contrast to the questionnaires typical of Wiltshire and North Wales, those relating to Essex were sufficiently full to obviate the need for a supplementary report by the Assistant Commissioner, unless there was a lengthy dispute over some aspect of the agreement.⁴ As can be seen in Table II, they demanded a fuller account of the financial details of tithe commutation and asked for information on agriculture in only two questions, 11 and 22.

The answers to Question 11 were sometimes very brief, but, usually, there were detailed descriptions of the soils of the parish and the methods of husbandry employed by the farmers. The nature of this material is best illustrated by quoting a few examples. The parish of Laindon, for instance, had

¹ T.F., Chippenham.

² J. W. Edwards, *op. cit.*, Chapter 2.

³ T.Fs., Chippenham, Kington St Michael, and Oaksey.

⁴ There were, in fact, two types of Essex questionnaire, but although their format differed their contents were similar.

"a stiff, hungry clay soil, very cloddy, requiring to be ploughed five or six times . . . and in dry seasons as many as eight times."¹ In Little Wakering, there was an "excellent . . . crumbling species of clay, not sufficiently tenacious to hold water."² The marshes of Rainham were described by B. Knyaston as "too well known to make it necessary for me to say that they afford the best pasturage for all descriptions of Cattle."³ The Assistant Commissioner for Horndon-on-the-Hill noted the adoption of an unorthodox five-course rotation of fallow, wheat, seeds, wheat, and beans, and doubted whether the farmers "profited much in the end by so quick a succession of wheat crops."⁴ Comments on agricultural improvement were frequent; it was recorded for Buttsbury that liming "puts the soil into a proper state of consistency (as medicine does to the disordered stomach to receive the nourishment of food)."⁵

In calculating the amount of titheable produce, the Assistant Commissioners made estimates of the areas under each of the main crops, their average yields, and their average market price. These were all included in the answer to Question 22. The area under each crop was almost invariably calculated by subdividing the total area of arable land in a parish by the number of courses in the rotation most widely practised in that parish; by using this method, the degree of accuracy could not possibly be high. In some cases, the crudity of these estimates was reduced by dividing the arable into different soil types, making a separate estimate for each type (sometimes according to different rotations), and subdividing the courses. In a few instances, the acreages of each crop appear to have been measured.⁶

The paucity of the statistics relating to livestock in Essex seems to indicate that the agistment tithe had already been commuted to a money rent in most parishes, because, when no statistics on animals were given, there was usually a rentable value assigned to pasture, while, occasionally, the agistment tithe itself was given as a monetary value.⁷ The few files which do contain material relating to livestock generally have the numbers of the cows, sheep, horses, etc., and some indication of their value. In Finchingfield, for instance, it was estimated that there were 1,695 sheep, each producing three pounds of wool, at one shilling per pound; 282 ewes, each producing one lamb, which was expected to sell for eighteen shillings; 50 cows, each producing £7 per annum; 100 beasts (lean cattle), each producing seventy shillings per annum; and 50 sows, each producing £3 per annum.⁸

¹ T.F., Laindon.

² T.F., Little Wakering.

³ T.F., Rainham.

⁴ T.F., Horndon-on-the-Hill.

⁵ T.F., Buttsbury.

⁶ See T.Fs., Chingford, Laindon, and Rayleigh.

⁷ See T.Fs., Chingford, Orsett, and Peldon.

⁸ T.F., Finchingfield.

Report on the Agreement for the Commutation of the Tithes of the parish of North Ockendon in the county of Essex. Visited 26th day of September 1838 by Horace William Meteyard.

- ¹ The answers to the North Ockendon Tithe File are given in full (except that to Question 20).

of Essex clay. It is well farmed and it is fine wheat and bean land; on the Eastern part which is adjacent to a Marsh called Bulphan fen, the land becomes worse becoming cold hungry and moorish but with the exception of this bears fine crops.

12. *State the Value of the Tithes (if any) collected in kind for each year of the seven preceding Christmas 1835; and if more than one Tithe-owner, the sum so received by each; and give the Average?*

1829 £436 7s. 6d. Nominal composition £540 17s. 6d.

1830 £436 7s. 6d.

1831 £437 8s. 6d.

1832 £487 0s. 3d.

1833 £487 0s. 3d.

1834 £438 9s. 6d.

1835 £438 9s. 6d. Average composition £451 11s. 10½d.

13. *When the Tithes have been compounded, give the Amount of each year's composition, and the average as in number twelve.*

14. *Deduct the Average of the Abatements made during the Seven Years from the Composition agreed for, and carry out the product?*

15. *When the Tithe-owner has not paid the Rates, set forth the sum paid on account of the Tithe for each description of Rate during the Seven Years, calculating the same by what would have been paid by the Tithe-owner had the Tithes been assessed on the same principle as other Tithes in the neighbourhood; viz.*

TOTAL amount for Poor's Rate

Ditto Road Rates, including Statute Duty

Ditto Gaol or County Rates

Ditto of any other Rates or Taxes Average.

Poor Rate averages 3s. 1¾d. and Highway Rate 6½d. Total 3s. 8d. in the pound.

16. *Was the Composition so paid, an average Composition as regards neighbouring parishes similarly situated?*

The actual composition paid no doubt was as well as the nominal composition. I could not understand that the latter had ever been paid, certainly not within the Seven Years by about 17 per cent. The difference between the two being £540 17s. 6d.—£451 11s. 0d. or near £90.

17. *Personal Tithes, as Fish, Minerals etc; if any, state the amount of Receipts in each year during the Seven; and if included in the Agreement, the increase to the Rent-charge on account of them.*

None.

18. *If Easter offerings, Mortuaries or Surplice Fees are included in the Agreement, state the average Receipts for each, and the increase to the Rent-charge on account of them?*

Are not included and may amount to £1.

19. *State your opinion as to the accuracy of the Schedule, especially as to any Moduses or Exemptions set out therein; and if there are any objections to the Schedule on this or other points, state them, with the Names and Interests of the objecting Parties, and your opinion thereon?*

There are no objections to the accuracy of the Schedule and no moduses.

20. *State your opinion as to the fairness of the Agreement; if any objections are made to the amount of the Rent-charge, or to any proceeding relating thereto state them, the Names and Interests of the objecting Parties and your opinion thereon?*

I see no reason for the Rent-charge to exceed the Composition and Rates. At the Signing of the Agreement Mrs. Branfell whose assessment is £335 0s. 0d. objected to the Rent-charge, but the interest of the Signing Land-owners was sufficient of itself to satisfy the act of Parliament. . . In no instance in Essex that has come under my eye, have the Composition and Rates, or the Value of the Soil had seemingly anything to do with the formation of the Rent-charge, but the titheowner has acted upon the more direct principle of getting as much as would be given.

Rettendon has £830 on 2,410 acres of arable and 442 acres of grass. North Ockendon has £540 on 1,257 acres of arable and 270 acres of grass.

21. *Whether the Agreement should be confirmed?*

I recommend that the Rent-charge should stand at £510 0s. 0d. instead of £540 0s. 0d., adding £10 for the Glebe.

22. *A description and rough Estimate of the Amount of the Titheable Produce, and the Value of the Tithes, after deducting the Expense of Collection, with a statement of the Grounds of adopting any Rate per Cent as the Expenses of Collection; Specifying also the Rent-charge of the Several Quantities of Titheable Lands in the Schedule.*

Total quantity of Titheable land	1,570a. 3r. 35p.
Arable	1,257a. 1r. 3p.
Meadow and Pasture	270a. 2r. 32p.
Wood	13a. 0r. 0p.
Glebe	30a. 0r. 0p.
	1,570a. 3r. 35p.

Rent-charge £550

In lieu of arable and grass £540

On glebe £10

Fine heavy land 857a.

275a.	Wheat	at 3½Q. at 56s.	£2,518 12s. 0d.
	Turnips	80a. at £2 10s. 0d.	200 0 0
200a.	Mangold-wurzel	30a. at £2 15s. 0d.	82 10 0
	Peas and Beans	60a. at 4Q. at 28s.	336 0 0
	Oats	30a. at 5Q. at 22s.	165 0 0
	Wheat	80a. at 3½Q. at 56s.	784 0 0
	Peas and Beans	10a. at 4Q. at 28s.	56 0 0
	Barley	30a. at 4Q. at 28s.	168 0 0
200a.	Cabbages	5a. at £4	20 0 0
	Potatoes	15a. at £4	60 0 0
	Mown clover	30a. at 2 tons at £3 10s. 0d.	210 0 0
	Fed clover	30a. at £1 15s. 0d.	52 0 0
200a.	Long Fallow		
			£4,562 2s. 0d.

Heavy inferior 400a. 1r. 3p.

100a.	Wheat	at 2Q. at 56s.	£560
	Oats	40a. at 4Q. at 22s.	176
100a.	Peas and Beans	20a. at 3Q. at 28s.	84
	Mangold-wurzel and Turnips	40a. at £1 10s. 0d.	60

100a.	{ Peas and Beans	10a. at 3Q. at 28s.	£42
	{ Oats	20a. at 4Q. at 22s.	88
	{ Cabbages and Potatoes	10a. at £2 10s. 0d.	25
	{ Fed Clover	60a. at £1 10s. 0d.	90
100a. 1r. 3p. Long Fallow			£1,250 0 0
Pasture	100a. Hay at 2 tons at 70s.		700 0 0
	175a. Fed at £2		350 0 0
Wood	13a. at 10s.		6 10 0
Total			£6,834 2 0
Gross Tithe			683 8 2½
Expense of collection: ½			136 13 7
Net Tithe			£537 14s. 6¾d. ¹

Note: Areas in acres (and roods and perches); yields in quarters or tons; and market prices in shillings.

Roots and fed clover, as well as fed pasture and wood, are valued by the acre.

This is a more detailed estimate than is usual.

SUGGESTED TREATMENT OF THE AGRICULTURAL INFORMATION CONTAINED IN THE TITHE FILES

The tithe files of north-west Wiltshire and North Wales yield little quantitative information about arable land beyond noting the most important rotation in each parish and, in some cases, the constituent crops. Yet, for Essex, the rotations were often explicitly stated, and they were implicit in the calculations of crop areas. It must be emphasized that the tithe file crop statistics were estimates. Indeed, M. C. Naish considered the crop details in the Hampshire tithe files "generalized and inaccurate,"² and Elizabeth Burrell, commenting on those relating to the Suffolk Sandlings, agreed with this view, pointing out that the method of calculation did "not allow for any variations in field size nor for any exception to the normal rotation."³ Some idea of the magnitude of the error likely to occur can be gained from the Rayleigh (Essex) tithe file, which is unique in that it contains measured acreages as well as two estimates.

The Assistant Commissioners were themselves conscious of the intricacies in making estimates of crop acreages. Because he was "no expert" on the market-garden type of farming, which was predominant in Little Ilford, the Assistant Commissioner made his estimate according to what he considered the parish would yield under normal good farming.⁴ The valuer who visited

¹ The arithmetic of these totals is wrong, though the yields are calculated accurately.

² M. C. Naish, *op. cit.*, p. 333.

³ E. D. R. Burrell, *op. cit.*, p. 195.

⁴ T.F., Little Ilford.

TABLE III
CROP AREAS IN RAYLEIGH, ESSEX

<i>Crop</i>	<i>Measured Area (Acres)</i>	<i>Estimate by G. H. Eliot</i>	<i>Estimates by A. Offin and C. Matson</i>
Fallow	327	540	524
Barley	165	270	131
Oats	134	270	393
Beans	256	270	197
Peas	145	—	65
Clover	378	270	262
Tares	152	—	—
Wheat	705	540	524
Lucerne	10	—	—
Carraway	10	—	—
TOTAL	2,282	2,160	2,096

Ingatestone thought it impossible to make an accurate assessment, although he produced some statistics "based on the best information."¹ In the report on Saffron Walden, J. Pickering wrote: "This estimate will be one of the most conjectural I have ever made: the parish is a large one, the soil much intermixed and the mode of cultivation very various, and the extent of each crop only ascertainable by taking a detailed account."² But, lacking such a "detailed account," it is desirable to make some quantitative analysis of the statistics available; it is probable that they are no more inaccurate than the Acreage Returns of 1801, which have yielded much valuable information.³

There are three main reasons why these statistics are suited to cartographic treatment. First, for the purposes of the Assistant Commissioners, the crop estimates were merely a stage in the calculation of the total value of the titheable produce, from which the apportionment was made. For this they needed average figures rather than exact statistics for a particular year. Second, as unbiased investigators working to remove the incubus of tithe, they would have provoked less suspicion and animosity than the clergymen who made the acreage returns of 1801 and to whom farmers tended to make "an understatement of crops, as a mild form of tax evasion."⁴ Third, in the context of

¹ T.F., Ingatestone.

² T.F., Saffron Walden.

³ See, for example, H. C. K. Henderson, 'Agriculture in England and Wales in 1801', *Geographical Journal*, cxviii, 1952, pp. 338-45; and D. Thomas, 'The Acreage Returns of 1801 for the Welsh Borderland', *Trans. Institute of British Geographers*, xxvi, 1959, pp. 169-83.

⁴ H. C. K. Henderson, *op. cit.*, p. 340.

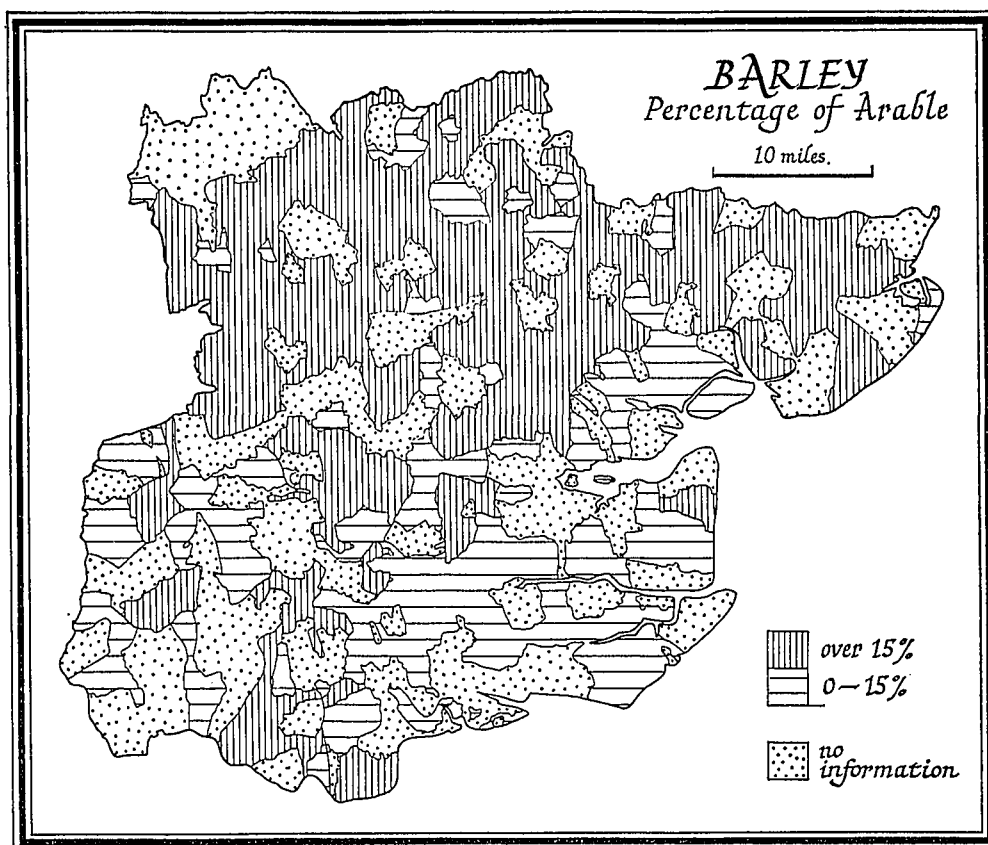


FIG. 1. BARLEY IN ESSEX.

the whole county, the disadvantages of the generalizations made for a single parish become insignificant. Although these generalizations are unsuitable for the precise depiction of detail, they can be used quite satisfactorily to give an average picture of the conditions that existed over a wide area.

The inexactitude of the statistics must be borne in mind when treating them cartographically. For instance, when coupled with the wide range of crops involved, it makes mapping by divided circles, which demands precise measurements, unsuitable. Instead, it is better to show each major crop as a percentage of total arable on separate choropleth maps, with a constant scale of values to facilitate the comparison of one map with another. This technique reduces the amount of error, for, whereas it might be wrong to state that a parish had 25 per cent of its arable under wheat, it would be more correct to say that the percentage was between 15 and 30. This method was employed in a thesis on the agricultural geography of Essex *c.* 1840.¹ In this

¹ E. A. Cox, *An Agricultural Geography of Essex c. 1840*, London Univ. M.A. thesis, 1963.

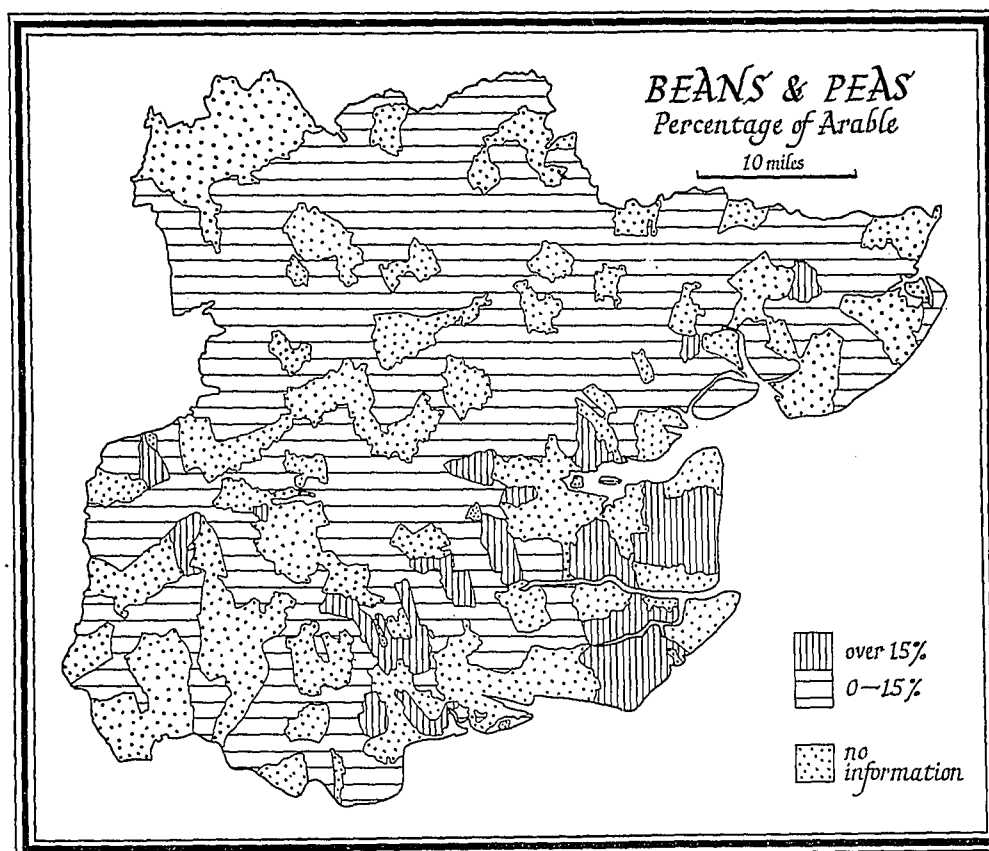


FIG. 2. BEANS AND PEAS IN ESSEX.

work, separate maps of wheat, barley, oats, green crops, beans and peas, turnips, and dead fallow were constructed, and these showed several interesting distributions (see Figs. 1 and 2). It was observed, for instance, that the contrast between the lighter soils of the north and north-east of the county and the heavy clays of the south, expressed as an arable-grass boundary on the Land Utilization Survey Map of the 1930's, was reflected in the distributions of the various crops in the mid-nineteenth century. This relationship between crops and soils would not have been discovered without the quantitative information derived from the tithe files, for it was completely masked by the crude land-use classification of the tithe apportionments and maps.

On the other hand, the remaining statistics contained in the estimates of titheable produce do not submit to satisfactory cartographic analysis. The figures for average yields are so variable within areas of similar soils and similar methods of husbandry that their value seems doubtful. It must be remembered that for the purposes of the apportionment a par rentcharge was

required,¹ and that to assess this, average crop estimates and average yields were often used. Hence, in the second report for North Ockendon (Essex), which was mostly in a "high state of cultivation," the Assistant Commissioner wrote: "In making the calculations . . . I have adopted a scale of estimated quantities per acre of each description of grain less by 25 per cent than those stated by the Tenants, as I consider the produce under ordinary farming to be the just criterion."² Like the crop estimates, the assessments of yields were subjective, but they were much less easily checked by the Assistant Commissioners, who depended to a great extent on the veracity of the farmers. H. Pilkington, for example, who made the calculations for Fordham (Essex), thought that his estimate should be treated with care, as "one Bushel of Corn/acre or one cwt. of Green Crops more or less will make a considerable difference in the total produce of a large parish."³ The mapping of the crop yields was not therefore attempted in the thesis on Essex, although the statistics were used in the text. The prices used in the calculations appear to have been constant, their almost complete uniformity over the entire county making them useless for assessing the influence of local markets.

Because of their fragmentary nature, the livestock figures in the Essex questionnaires cannot be mapped. On the questionnaire illustrated in Table I, by contrast, the livestock figures for each tithe district were consistently stated in answer to Question 12, so that it is possible to map them. In writing an agricultural geography of north-west Wiltshire, where cattle farming was the predominant form of agriculture *c.* 1840, it is particularly useful to be able to produce a distribution map of cattle for that date. It has been found that the best technique is to use the totals of cows to construct a dot map, with one dot representing ten cows, although the value of the dot will depend on the scale of the map (Fig. 3).⁴ The dots are placed according to the distribution of meadow and pasture as shown on the land-use map derived from the tithe apportionments and maps. A greater number of dots are placed on river meadows and those pastures where it would be expected that the capacity for feeding cows was higher. Such a map assumes that all the cows were feeding on the grassland, while the crops on the arable were closed to them. For north-west Wiltshire, this map shows very clearly where the principal cattle-farming areas were; it also minimizes the fact that each parish figure was an estimate by expressing it in the context of a much larger area. Unfortunately, the available information covers only half of north-west Wilt-

¹ Secretary, Tithe Redemption Commission, *op. cit.*, p. 133.

² T.F., North Ockendon.

³ T.F., Fordham.

⁴ B. R. Dittmer, *An Agricultural Geography of North-west Wiltshire, 1770-1850*, London Univ. M.A. thesis, 1963.

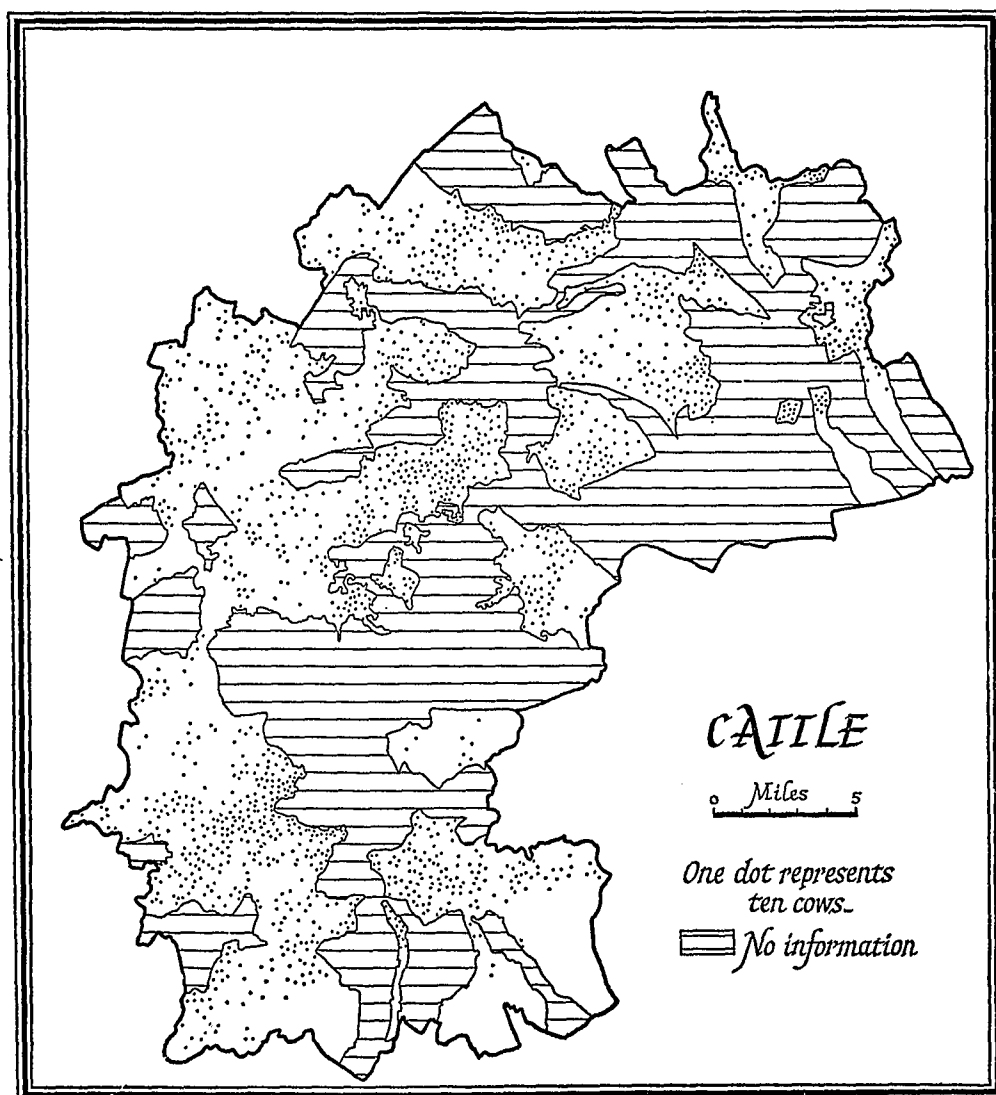


FIG. 3. CATTLE IN WILTSHIRE.

shire—a severe and consistent failing of all tithe-file information. A similar map could be drawn from the sheep estimates.

The livestock estimates may be used in another way. By dividing the total number of cows given in the tithe file of a particular parish into the number of acres of meadow and pasture given in the corresponding apportionment, the number of acres of grassland supporting each beast may be calculated on a parish basis. Most cattle farmers were accustomed to assess the quality of their land in these terms, and, hence, the map based on these figures is very instructive. By expressing them as a ratio, the inexact nature of the livestock

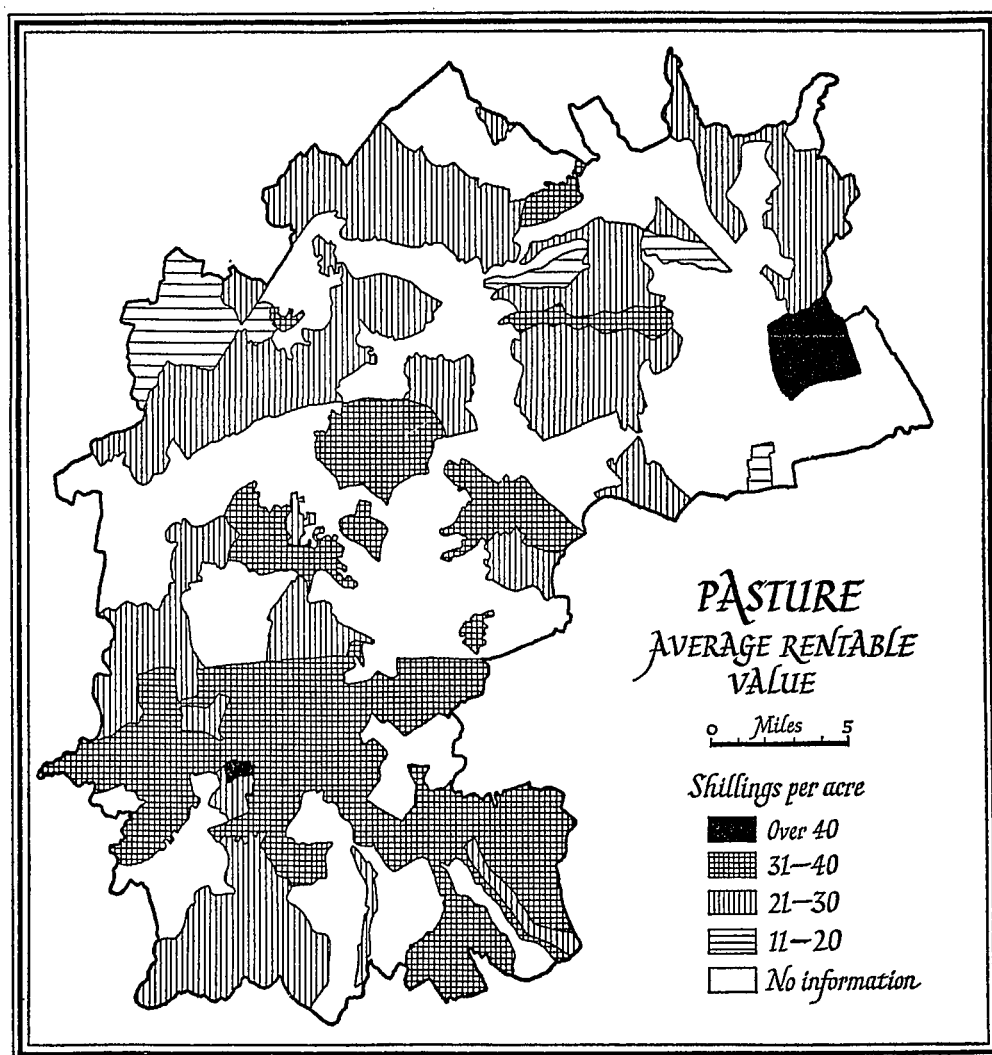


FIG. 4. RENTS OF PASTURE IN WILTSHIRE.

estimates is, again, discounted. Similarly, the density of sheep (per 100 acres) could be mapped.

Most farmland was valued at some time or another as a basis for assessing rents, land-tax, poor-rates, etc. The average annual rentable value of an area of land is probably the best possible quantitative statement of its quality, and one which may be analysed for the purpose of comparing one region with another. The answers to Questions 6 and 13 (Table I) make it possible to draw maps to show the variations in the average rentable value of arable and pasture respectively (Fig. 4). These maps form an excellent summary for the agricultural geography of any area, as the rentable values mapped would be

affected by factors such as relief, soils, land drainage, manuring, and general farm management that would be discussed in such a study. In north-west Wiltshire, for example, maps of the average rentable value of arable and pasture illustrate how the superior quality of the land and the farming in the clay vales compared with that on the poor rendzina soils of the Cotswold fringe in the extreme north-west of the county.

The tithe files contain only a fraction of the material originally stored in them. It is not known what documents have been "weeded" from them, but they may have included much additional information on contemporary agriculture, perhaps in the form of letters from local landowners and tithe owners to the Tithe Commissioners in London.¹ These private letters connected with tithe commutation may sometimes be found in local county record offices. In fact, some of these record offices keep miscellaneous documents concerning the tithe surveys which form an important source of information supplementary to the tithe files. At the Essex Record Office, for instance, there are records of crop estimates made by tithe valuers for six different parishes.²

This paper has restricted discussion of the tithe files to their use as a source for an agricultural geography of England and Wales *c.* 1840. This is not to suggest that these documents contain nothing of interest or value to the economic historian. Indeed, some of the files have details of local agricultural prices, tithe payments, rates and taxes, land ownership, restrictive leases, and the quantity and value of glebe land, which are essential to an understanding of local economic history.

One tithe file alone is only of local interest; but the complete collection of about 11,800 files constitutes a historical source of major significance. So far they have been thoroughly examined for only a few areas, representing a total of about three million acres. Fully 90 per cent of the files await serious study. Any work on mid-nineteenth-century agriculture in England and Wales must make thorough use of the tithe maps and apportionments; any work that uses the tithe maps and apportionments would be incomplete without reference to the tithe files and the unofficial, supplementary, tithe documents in the county record offices.

¹ Secretary, Tithe Redemption Commission, *op. cit.*, p. 136.

² Essex Record Office: D:DOP B.39, 29; D:DOP B.39, 34, 1; D:DHw F.36; D:DOP B.39, 44, 1-2; D:DOP 70, 2; D:DOP 13, 2.