

Some Former Hop-growing Centres

By D. C. D. POCOCK

EVER since hops were first introduced from Flanders at the beginning of the sixteenth century English hop-growing has been largely confined to the four south-eastern counties of Kent, Sussex, Surrey, and Hampshire and to Herefordshire and Worcestershire in the West Midlands (Table I). Today under forty of some 20,000 acres are located outside the two main centres; even in the past under conditions of greater regional self-sufficiency only three other counties—Essex, Suffolk, and Nottinghamshire—achieved areas of hop-growing substantially in excess of one hundred acres. In these three counties, however, hop-growing held a degree of regional importance until its decline towards the middle of the last century, so that a comparative study may be made of some features of location, conditions of growth, and reasons for decline of the three former centres.¹

TABLE I
HOP ACREAGES BY GROUPINGS FOR SELECTED YEARS

Year	South-eastern England	West Midlands	Notts., Essex, Suffolk	Remaining Counties
1724	11,854	8,543	2,120	887
1835	37,963	14,525	1,246	190
1878	63,079	8,511	149	50

Sources: For 1724: *Treasury Papers*, 1729, vol. cclxxi (T, I, 271).
For 1835: *Parliamentary Papers*, 1839, vol. lxvi, pp. 519-69.
For 1878: Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

The extent of the former producing areas may be gauged from the distribution of parishes with records of hop plantations between approximately 1790 and 1830 (Fig. 1). In Nottinghamshire the hop-growing area stretched from Retford to Southwell, and was known as the 'North Clays' district on account of its position north of the Trent and of the heavy nature of the loams developed from the Keuper Marls. Some thirty-five parishes contained hop yards. A similar number of parishes comprised the hop-growing area of Essex, concentrated in a compact zone between Sudbury and Braintree, pre-

¹ Regional studies by the author of hop-growing in South-eastern England and the West Midlands can be found in *Annual Report*, Department of Hop Research, Wye College, 1957 and 1958 respectively.

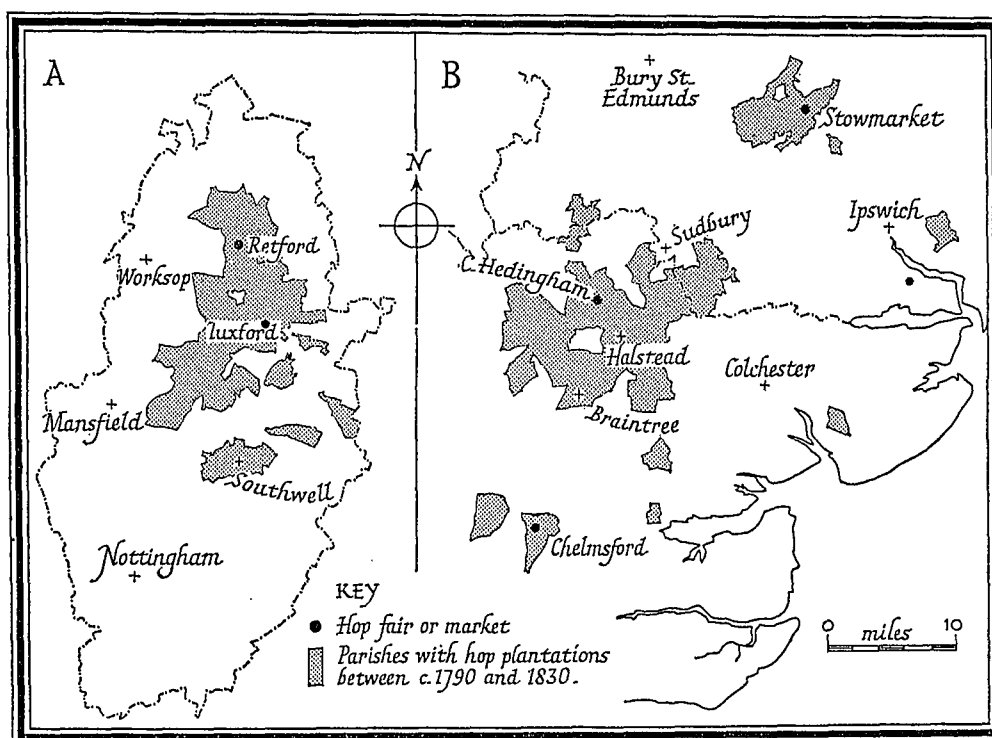


FIG. 1

dominantly on chalky loams. Isolated parishes to the south and east were mainly in the lower sections of river valleys. The main area of Suffolk hop-growing was in the vicinity of Stowmarket, with a second area adjoining the Essex-Suffolk border. In both of the East Anglian counties the hop fields were termed 'gardens' following the Kentish usage. Although the existence of 'wild' hops or field names suggests a wider distribution, in all three counties excise returns and local records indicate that the areas shown in Fig. 1 were always the main producing areas.¹

Hops were probably introduced into Essex and Suffolk soon after their arrival in Kent in the early sixteenth century. Proximity to London and Flanders, suitable soils, and a tradition of enclosed agriculture provided a favourable combination of factors surpassed only by those of Kent to the south of the Thames. The earliest record of hop-growing is 1590,² while one of the two classic works of the sixteenth century on hop cultivation (Tusser's *Five Hundreth Points*) was written by a Suffolk farmer. Tradition

¹ E.g. W. C. Waller, 'Essex field names', *Trans. Essex Archaeological Soc.*, v-ix, 1895-1903.

² Essex Record Office, D, ABW 2, 293. Lance tells of Kentish farmers establishing hops in Essex—E. J. Lance, *The Hop Farmer*, 1838, p. 41.

has it that hops were taken from this area and introduced to Surrey and Hampshire.¹

Hop-growing later reached Nottinghamshire. Although the exact date is unknown, it is probable that the crop was being cultivated by the middle of the seventeenth century.² The first excise returns show Defoe to be in error in 1722 when he wrote that no hop grounds existed north of the Trent.³ Distance from the counties where the plant was first introduced, an open-field system of agriculture, and a strong preference for unhopped ales discouraged early cultivation. Two points, however, may have influenced its introduction and subsequent extension. In the seventeenth century the county grew large quantities of barley and had malt and ale-brewing industries of extra-regional importance.⁴ The existence of this industry plus the distance to the nearest hop fair (Stourbridge, Cambridgeshire) may have encouraged an attempt to provide local sources of the raw material. Secondly, the area to the west of Retford and Tuxford, still known as 'The Dukeries', contained the homes of several titled persons. Their connections with the south of England may have induced initial experiments when the new plant was grown on a small, even domestic, scale; later precept and example may have sustained growth of the expensive and delicate plant while experiments in many other parts of the country proved unsuccessful.⁵

Hop-growing in both Nottinghamshire and Essex attained a maximum area of approximately one thousand acres, Suffolk less than half this, throughout the eighteenth century (Table II).

TABLE II
HOP ACREAGES FOR SELECTED YEARS

	<i>Nottinghamshire</i>	<i>Essex</i>	<i>Suffolk</i>
1724	943	890	314
1835	720	374	152
1866	76	137	127
1878	37	37	75

Sources: As for Table I. 1866 returns from the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

¹ J. Aubrey, *Natural History and Antiquities of the County of Surrey*, 1673, 1718-19, III, pp. 346-7. ² P.R.O., *Treasury Papers*, 1729, CCLXXI (T, 1, 271).

³ D. Defoe, *A Tour through England and Wales* (Everyman ed., 1928), I, p. 83.

⁴ *Ibid.*, II, p. 146.

⁵ The homes of titled persons were at Clumber, Rufford, Thoresby, and Welbeck. In the nineteenth century the plantations of the Earl of Scarborough (Rufford) were continually mentioned as an example worthy of other growers' attention.

The average yields for Essex and Suffolk for the period shown in Fig. 1 of between 4 and 8 cwt per acre were comparable with the yields of Kent and Sussex. Moreover, the type of hop, although not rivalling the choice Farnham product, was considered at least equal in flavour to the Kentish varieties.¹ The North Clays on the other hand supported a coarse variety of hop and yielded only 3–6 cwt per acre; it equalled or exceeded the national figure only in exceptional years.

In all three counties there is evidence that hop-growing extended to soils which today would be considered unsuitable for the hop plant. Young referred to moor and boggy ground in both Essex and Suffolk,² but the feature was most widespread in Nottinghamshire where Lowe recorded that plantations lay "in vallies and wet lands for the most part, not very valuable for other purposes."³ Although the North Clays' variety did not call for the optimum conditions of soil and drainage which are sought today, there is definite evidence that in years of heavy rainfall the use of many damp sites lowered substantially the district's total output.⁴

Employment given by the industry during both growth and harvest, and also in ancillary occupations such as copse maintenance and sack manufacture, was of local importance to the labouring classes in the three areas. A wider significance was achieved by the rise of hop fairs, which attracted merchants from various parts of England. Retford, as the most northerly hop fair in the country, was of special importance until the breaking down of traditional economic watersheds and marketing limits with the advent of rail transport. The benefit of hop cultivation to the agriculture of the three areas generally is questionable, for often other farm activities were neglected in an effort to produce a large hop harvest. Frequently, however, high yields coincided with low prices, although hop cultivation continued to be popularly associated with wealth. At one point in the eighteenth century it is recorded that landlords in Nottinghamshire ordered their tenants to reduce their hop acreage, "fancying that hop grounds were enriching the growers . . . without benefiting themselves in any way."⁵ Hop-growing was not so lucrative as is generally supposed, for production costs were six to seven times that for a comparable area of grain, and a heavy excise duty had to be paid, quite apart from the risk involved in growing a delicate plant that was peculiarly vulnerable to pests and diseases right up to the time of harvest. The wide fluctua-

¹ Rev. A. Young, *Agriculture of the County of Essex*, 1807, p. 39; E. J. Lance, *op. cit.*, p. 128.

² Rev. A. Young, *Agriculture of the County of Suffolk*, 1797, p. 88.

³ R. Lowe, *A General View of the Agriculture of Nottingham*, 1798, p. 39.

⁴ *Nottingham Journal*, 6 October 1848.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 6 October 1865.

tions of hop duty—a direct reflection of yield—in Table III illustrate the uncertainty involved in hop-growing.¹ Thus the record of an Essex farmer in 1821 who appealed to his landlord for relief of obligation to grow hops, his seven acres having caused him to lose £100 for the preceding two years, may be taken as at least as representative of the conditions in the hop industry as the few, often repeated, stories of quickly amassed fortunes.²

TABLE III
HOP DUTIES, 1822-6

	<i>Nottinghamshire</i>	<i>Essex-Suffolk</i>
1822	£3,162	£3,108
1823	7	71
1824	1,331	1,498
1825	1,341	78
1826	3,570	3,868

The duty was 1½d. per pound.

Source: E. J. Lance, *The Hop Farmer*, appendix.

The hop-growing area of Essex and Suffolk declined during the eighteenth century with increasing competition from the very much larger, more scientific, and often more highly capitalized hop cultivation in Kent, associated with which was the increasing concentration of marketing at Southwark, to the *south* of the Thames. East Anglian farmers were thus less well equipped to withstand vagaries of production. The more isolated position of the Nottingham district allowed the persistence of a high acreage for a longer period but caused the eventual decline to be more precipitous. A nineteenth-century peak of 750 acres in 1837 was halved in twelve years, and this total had dwindled to a mere 76 acres in 1866. The advent of the railway coincided with a critical period between 1839 and 1845 when inclement summers reduced the North Clays' yields to under three cwt per acre, and hop-growing was for six years a losing concern.³ The increased competition brought about by the railway exposed frequent mismanagement and assisted the general swing towards lighter types of beer necessitating better quality hops. The coarse North Clays' varieties were therefore confronted with a contracting market.

¹ A full account of the speculative nature of hop-growing is given by P. Mathias, *The Brewing Industry in England 1700-1830*, 1959, pp. 475-536.

² Essex Record Office, D:DO B.37, 3.

³ *Nottingham Journal*, 10 October 1845.

Hop-growing finally ceased in all three counties about the end of the last century (Essex 1887, Nottingham 1892, Suffolk 1906), leaving the commercial production of the specialized crop confined to the two areas where the extent of hop land had always been measured not in hundreds but in thousands of acres.

Notes and Comments

THE BRITISH AGRICULTURAL HISTORY SOCIETY

The joint winter conference with the Association of Agriculture was held at the London School of Economics on Saturday, 5 December. The president of the Society, Mr R. V. Lennard, took the chair. At the morning session, Professor J. G. D. Clark of the University of Cambridge addressed a large audience on 'The Early Spread of Agriculture in Europe.' The afternoon discussion of Professor Clark's paper was led by Mr B. C. Thomas of the University of Edinburgh, Mr C. Bowen of the Royal Commission on Historic Monuments, and Mr G. E. Fussell.

The annual general meeting and conference of the Society will be held at Keele Hall, University of Keele, from Wednesday, 7 April, to Friday, 9 April 1965. Details and an application form are enclosed.

Arrangements for the 1966 April conference in Dublin are in hand.

AN INTERNATIONAL GLOSSARY OF GEOGRAPHICAL TERMS

At the International Geographical Congress held in London in July 1964 a meeting was held to discuss the compilation of an international glossary of geographical terms used in the study of the historical and contemporary agricultural landscape. Geographers from many countries were present, and it was agreed that this work, which had already been discussed tentatively at two previous international congresses at Nancy and Vadstena, should be put in hand immediately. The glossary will include terms used in all lan-

guages, but the definitions are to be translated into three languages, English, French, and German, and possibly, if translators can be found, into Russian and Spanish.

Professor Harald Uhlig of the Geographical Institute, Justus-Liebig University, Giessen, was appointed secretary of the committee, and all material for the glossary will be assembled at Giessen. Correspondents were chosen from all other countries represented at the meeting, and a secretary was selected to collect contributions from his colleagues and keep in contact with the general secretary. Standard forms are being compiled on which the terms and definitions will be entered, and these should be ready by the middle of 1965. Anyone willing to assist by offering definitions and examples of the use of terms should write to the secretary for the United Kingdom, Dr R. H. Buchanan, Department of Geography, The Queen's University, Belfast.

It is hoped that agricultural historians will offer as much help as they can with this project, since the need to standardize the use of terms in agricultural history is urgent. A short glossary of terms used in the description of common-field farming was published in the REVIEW (Volume IX, 1961) and the editor will gladly offer space to any correspondence or other contributions on controversial or ambiguous terms which will assist this new enterprise.

LAND USE IN HERTFORDSHIRE

The Hertfordshire Local History Council has set up a committee to co-ordinate work on a

(continued on p. 60)