

The Parliamentary Enclosure Movement and Rural Society in Warwickshire

By J. M. MARTIN

ALTHOUGH a number of studies of rural society based on enclosure awards have been made, often they have been of parishes chosen at random throughout the country, or of single parishes.¹ That of H. G. Hunt, based on Leicestershire awards, was perhaps a more satisfactory investigation, though his attention was confined mainly to 45 enclosures where the whole parish area was dealt with.² Clearly, such parishes might have, in some respects, a special character of their own.

Few, if any, studies have investigated all awards relating to a particular county, although it is perhaps only by so doing that the profoundly varied character of the movement, even within the confines of a single area, can be demonstrated. It was, in part, with the aim of giving closer attention to the variety of meaning which the word 'enclosure' could possess in the eighteenth century, that a study of this movement in Warwickshire was undertaken. A further, related aim was to throw light on the different kinds of rural community and landownership structure existing in Warwickshire, as these differences were reflected in the awards and other records.

It was discovered, in the first place, that the character of enclosure appeared to change from period to period during the course of the eighteenth century. This showed itself with respect to aims, the men behind enclosure, the type of community affected, and the social consequences. Apart from the time factor, it was felt that enclosure meant quite different things in different geographical localities. Warwickshire showed considerable variety of soil conditions and topography. First the Felden south was differentiated from the pastoral Arden Forest in the north. Within the Felden itself there were differences between the highly fertile Avon valley and the heavy intractable clays of the south-east, towards the Northamptonshire border.

Taking our standpoint around 1700, a number of features distinguished the various communities from one another. The Arden Forest parishes were

¹ For a comprehensive survey of studies dealing with various phases of the enclosure movement prior to 1954, see W. H. Chaloner, 'Bibliography of Recent Work on Enclosure, the Open Fields, and Related Topics', *Agric. Hist. Rev.*, II, 1954.

² H. G. Hunt, 'Landownership and Enclosure, 1750-1830', *Econ. Hist. Rev.*, 2nd ser., XI, no. 3, 1959.

large and consisted of scattered hamlets. The Felden communities, on the other hand, consisted of smaller, nucleated villages. Furthermore, both the soil and the villages were poorer in the Arden, compared with the south. There were differences also in landownership structure and in husbandry practice, not only as between north and south but also, within the Felden, between the Avon valley and the south-east, and between old-enclosed and open parishes.

The 1663 Hearth Tax suggests differentiation in the size of these communities, and a variable standard of wealth in each locality.¹

TABLE I

VARIATIONS IN THE SIZE OF RURAL COMMUNITIES IN WARWICKSHIRE

<i>Type of parish</i>	<i>Average number of households based on 1663 Hearth Tax Return</i>
18 Forest-type	120.4 (over 190 in 5 parishes)
64 Felden (open-field)	54.2
18 „ (old-enclosed)	46.4

TABLE II

VARIATIONS IN STANDARDS OF WEALTH IN RURAL COMMUNITIES IN WARWICKSHIRE

<i>Type of parish</i>	<i>Average number of households exempted on grounds of poverty</i>	<i>Average number of households assessed in 1663 Hearth Tax Return at</i>	
		<i>1 hearth only</i>	<i>over 2 hearths</i>
17 Forest-type	48.0	50	2
63 Felden (open-field)	17.5	20	9
23 „ (old-enclosed)	15.1	11	12

The comparatively poor quality of the agricultural land and the high proportion of uncultivated waste and woodland in the Arden north were reflected in the assessment to the land-tax made at the end of the seventeenth century, and based on the rental value of the land.² The majority of the Forest parishes were assessed at 0.8s. per acre, compared with 1.3s. per acre for the county as a whole. The highest assessments, in some cases nearly 2s. per acre, were

¹ The Warwickshire Hearth Tax Return for 1663: Warwick County Record Office (hereafter Warwick C.R.O.), Shire Hall, Warwick, MS. QS.11/5.

² Warwickshire Land Tax Returns 1779-1830. On microfilm in Bodleian Library, Oxford, Western MSS.

not unnaturally of land in Felden parishes already enclosed by the later seventeenth century.

Court-rolls, glebe-terriers, and enclosure-awards suggest some degree of flexibility in pre-enclosure farming methods within the county.¹ Within the traditional framework there were noticeable changes from the seventeenth century, at least. As a result, in a sample of farming inventories made in the summer months of the years 1698 to 1704 a movement is discernible towards more variable husbandry to suit the soil conditions and market demand of each locality.²

As one might expect, the cultivators of the Avon valley seemed to be the best off; the average value of their farming stock was perhaps 60 per cent greater than those of Arden husbandmen, as suggested below.

TABLE III

THE VALUE OF FARM STOCK IN THREE WARWICKSHIRE LOCALITIES, 1698-1704

	<i>Felden</i> (<i>Avon Valley</i>)	<i>Felden</i> (<i>South-East</i>)	<i>Arden Forest</i>
Total inventories used	14	28	27
Average value of farming stock, 1698-1704	£151.4	£107.0	£93.6

The total value of the crops was more than twice as great in the Avon Valley as in the Arden, and the difference was almost as marked in respect of the former and the south-east clays.

TABLE IV

THE VALUE OF CROPS IN THREE WARWICKSHIRE LOCALITIES, 1698-1704

	<i>Felden</i> (<i>Avon Valley</i>)	<i>Felden</i> (<i>South-East</i>)	<i>Arden Forest</i>
Total inventories used	14	28	27
Average value of crops, 1698- 1704	£83.6	£43.1	£37.8

¹ For a discussion of some evidence, see J. M. Martin, 'Warwickshire and the Parliamentary Enclosure Movement', unpublished Ph.D. thesis in Birmingham University Library, Vol. 1, Chapter I, sections III and IV.

² See Inventories attached to wills, 1698-1704, of the Diocese of Worcester, St Helen's Church, Worcester.

On the other hand, the total value of the animal stock was more nearly the same in all localities. In the Arden it consisted chiefly of cattle and horses. Cattle rearing and fattening, and dairying activity were already significant in this forest area in the sixteenth century.¹ Horses, likewise, were bred here in the sixteenth century, though in the eighteenth century they may well be-taken the development of industrial activity in north Warwickshire where carrying services were becoming an important source of livelihood to the Arden villagers.²

TABLE V

THE VALUE OF ANIMAL STOCK IN THREE WARWICKSHIRE LOCALITIES

	<i>Felden</i> (<i>Avon Valley</i>)	<i>Felden</i> (<i>South-East</i>)	<i>Arden Forest</i>
Number of inventories used	14	28	27
Total value of animal stock	£66.0	£62.0	£53.8
Average value of sheep	£11.9	£19.4	£8.4
Average number of sheep	49.6	50.7	20.0
Average value of cattle	£28.6	£23.0	£30.0
Average number of cattle	12.0	11.5	11.3
Average value of horses	£19.0	£16.3	£17.0
Average number of horses	5.4	4.5	3.8
Average value of pigs	£3.0	£2.6	£2.2
Average number of pigs	3.7	1.3	2.5

Other differences showed themselves between the various localities and even between individual parishes within the same area. In the Felden rural society exhibited considerable contrasts. The lands of many parishes in the later seventeenth century remained in the possession of small squires and yeomen farmers.³ But the Felden was dotted with a growing number of enclosed and depopulated parishes in the hands of great landowners.

With the growth of population and the rise in poor-rate expenditure these 'closed' parishes came to be increasingly prized by eighteenth-century land-owners.⁴ Often such parishes lay contiguous to overcrowded 'open' parishes

¹ I am indebted to Dr J. Thirsk for this information. See also A. M. Mimardi re, 'The Finances of a Warwickshire Gentry Family 1693-1726', *University of Birmingham Historical Jnl*, ix, 2.

² As the commoners of Atherstone explained when their commonlands were threatened in the 1730's. See Warwick C.R.O., Compton-Bracebridge MS., Box H.R/35—*The Case of Atherstone concerning Inclosure of the Common Fields* by W. Baxter, 1738.

³ P. Styles, 'The Social Structure of Kineton Hundred in the Reign of Charles II', *Trans. Birmingham Arch. Soc.*, LXXVIII, 1962, p. 96.

⁴ See advertisement of estate in parish of Billesley: "There are only two houses in the parish, and the taxes are trifling."—*Aris' Birmingham Gazette*, 24 May 1756.

like 'Hungry' Harbury, where land ownership was widely dispersed and great poverty apparent from the later seventeenth century, at least. These villages formed convenient pools of agricultural labour for the 'closed' parishes.

In the Arden, not only were the rural communities comparatively large and poor by the later seventeenth century, but we have the impression that landownership was in many cases widely dispersed among a large number of smallish owners.¹ Socially, it was made up of communities of small freeholders, husbandmen, and a body of landless labourers and squatters which had come into existence in the second half of the seventeenth century.

Evidence is forthcoming of the fundamental necessity of rural industry to these, as to other, forest and pastoral communities in order to supplement a living from the land. Farming inventories originating from the Arden bear witness to the activity, here as elsewhere, in the woollen and linen industries. The parish registers for a few years around 1700 give the occupations of all people buried and this source likewise demonstrates the growing importance of rural industry in the Arden in the later seventeenth century. Below is a table of occupational figures to illustrate this point.

Evidence shows that other Arden parishes around Coventry were engaged

TABLE VI

OCCUPATIONAL STRUCTURE IN FOUR ARDEN PARISHES AROUND 1700

Arden parish	Total households, 1663	Total males where occupation recorded	Total engaged in occupation of		
			Farming	Crafts	Chief craft represented
Coughton ²	40	135	67	68 (54%)	24 metalworkers
Berkswell	200	192	119	73 (40%)	25 weavers
Knowle	227	201	104	49 (25%)	18 woodworkers
Hampton-in-Arden	55	129	88	30 (23%)	26 weavers
					4 nailers
					10 weavers

¹ How this landownership structure developed remains to be studied. There is some suggestion that here, as in other Forest localities, the system of inheritance may have been a factor. One Arden village where a peculiar system prevailed is described by the Board of Agriculture Reporter. W. Murray, *A General View of the Agriculture of Warwick*, 1815, p. 26.

² The figures relating to the parishes of Coughton and Berkswell are drawn from P. Styles, 'The Social Structure of Kineton Hundred. . .', *loc. cit.*, p. 99. Note: Only men whose main occupation was in some craft are here included. This does not take account of that vast army of part-time craftsmen who were described as 'husbandmen'.

from the early eighteenth century in producing felts and ribbons. Finally, in the north-east of the county entirely new rural industrial communities were growing up from the seventeenth century, dependent on the North Warwickshire coal-mining industry.

It is thus clear that the Parliamentary enclosure movement in Warwickshire can be understood only if it is studied against the background of quite different social and economic conditions, not only in different parts of the county but even in parishes within the same locality.

The total county acreage is 618,000 acres, of which it was estimated by W. E. Tate that 25 per cent was enclosed by private act, that is, 154,000 acres gross. This is probably an underestimate of land enclosed by this method.¹ Parliamentary enclosure began early in this county and the first few Acts appeared in the 1720's and 1730's. The majority, however, were passed between 1750 and 1779, when the long period of depressed agricultural prices was replaced by an even longer upward movement of all food prices, and also of wool. There was some correlation between the chronology of enclosure Acts and the fluctuating rise of grain prices in the Birmingham market.² Were it possible to attempt to correlate livestock prices in the same way, the results might prove at least as interesting.

The following table sets out the net acreage of common field and common land allotted to landowners under 125 Parliamentary awards in various periods.³

TABLE VII

THE NET ACREAGE OF LAND AWARDED TO LANDOWNERS BY PRIVATE ENCLOSURE ACTS

<i>Total Net Acreage allotted to Landowners in the Period, 1720-49:</i>									15,421 acres
"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	1750-69: 40,418 "
"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	1770-89: 44,709 "
"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	1790-1815: 28,060 "
"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	After 1815: 13,428 "

This land was allocated to various categories of landowner in the following proportions within the various periods.

¹ See J. M. Martin, 'Warwickshire and the Parliamentary Enclosure Movement', *loc. cit.*, Vol. I, Chapter II. Tate failed to include 6 parishes possessing common-fields which were enclosed by Act.

² J. M. Martin, 'Warwickshire and the Parliamentary Enclosure Movement', *loc. cit.*, Vol. II, Appendix XLI.

³ Awards dealing only with common waste are not included here. Also a further 8 awards which did include some common-field land are not included because of their illegibility or other difficulties.

TABLE VIII
ALLOTMENT OF LAND UNDER 125 ENCLOSURE AWARDS¹

Period of award	Allotment to owners of													
	Over 500 acres	300-500 acres	200-300 acres	100-200 acres	50-100 acres	10-50 acres	Under 10 acres							
	No.	Acreage	No.	Acreage	No.	Acreage	No.	Acreage	No.	Acreage	No.	Acreage		
12 awards 1720-49	7	7,722 50%	6	2,286 15%	2	469 3%	10	1,365 9%	28	2,044	53	1,211 23%	78	324
35 awards 1750-69	17	12,076 30%	15	5,717 14%	15	3,272 8%	51	5,980 15%	87	6,288	256	5,974 33%	272	1,011
38 awards 1770-89	11	10,177 23%	13	4,959 11%	23	5,735 12%	56	7,827 18%	123	8,866	252	6,089 36%	348	1,056
25 awards 1790-1815	11	9,974 36%	5	1,989 7%	15	3,666 13%	36	5,018 18%	55	3,812	126	3,158 26%	116	443
15 awards After 1815	5	5,357 40%	5	1,780 13%	5	1,342 10%	12	1,595 12%	27	1,972	51	1,156 25%	65	226

¹ Enclosure awards are perhaps the most useful source for a study of landownership structure in the eighteenth century. In this study they are linked up with land-tax assessments. In the use of the latter, an acreage equivalent has been calculated for each parish, following the suggestion of D. B. Grigg, 'The Land Tax Returns', *Agric. Hist. Rev.*, XI, pt I, 1963.

The first observation to be made on the state of landownership at the time of enclosure is that a considerable degree of inequality in the distribution of land had already come about by the enclosure date in almost all parishes; even those which were dominated largely by freeholders showed this trend.¹ Furthermore, most parishes, even some 'open' ones like Tysoe and Napton, possessed, by this time, big estates created in an earlier period by some great landlord.

Of the 133 enclosure awards examined for this study, some 45 dealt with roughly the whole parish area, extending over 56,652 acres. As we see from Tables VIII and IX above, the small owner was, generally speaking, stronger in his share of the land in this type of parish. Both tables, however, demonstrate that the strength of the various classes of landowner may have varied noticeably from phase to phase of the enclosure movement.

Before 1750 the Private Act was often merely an alternative to the Chancery Decree giving recognition to a private agreement. Under these early awards, the enclosure was carried out by a landowner, usually the lord of the manor, who had often bought out most of the other proprietors and sought to consolidate his estate. His aims were usually those of the great landowner: to increase his social and landowning strength and to augment his income from rents, at the expense of the lesser gentry and the freeholders. Conversion to grass was usual after these early Acts. Here then was a process familiar from the fifteenth century. In twelve such enclosures taking place between 1720 and 1749 proprietors of over 500 acres were already, at the time of the award, in possession of 50 per cent of the land. From the enclosure of Brinklow in 1742, and increasingly between 1750 and 1779, the character of enclosure seems to have changed. In the first place the nature of the community involved was different. Often the ancient freehold society remained more or less intact. The people behind enclosure in this phase of the movement appear, in a number of cases, to have been the freeholders themselves, or at least the more substantial of their class. The main aim was to embark upon further improved farming, either by laying down the open fields to grass, or by an intensification of mixed arable farming, depending on the locality. As we have already said, evidence suggests that experiments aimed at rationalized and economical land use were under way in common-field parishes from the seventeenth century. Enclosure is thus seen, at this time, as a natural culmination to improvements in freehold farming, a response to population

¹ A more detailed picture of landownership structure in each individual parish at the time of enclosure is given in J. M. Martin, 'Warwickshire and the Parliamentary Enclosure Movement', *loc. cit.*, Vol. II, Appendices v and vi.

growth and rising commodity prices from the 1750's.¹ Socially, the process was accompanied by the differentiation of the ranks of the freeholders (described later); hence the necessity to resort to Parliament.

In Alveston, one of the most progressive of these communities, where a number of innovations were introduced into the common fields, the community consisted entirely of freeholders, mainly in the possession of estates of between 70 and 130 acres at the time of the award. Enclosure was followed by a renewed burst of innovating activity to intensify grain production.²

At Wolfhamcote, another parish dominated by freeholders, and situated in the south-east clay land, 26 of the 32 freeholders belonging to one of the three hamlets there drew up a document stating their reasons for seeking an enclosure.³ "The soil is naturally unfit for ploughing . . . the fields will not produce half the crops as the lighter and more mixed soils do in the neighbouring fields with half the labour and expense . . . the turf in Flecknoe Field is very proper for grazing . . . our reliance has long lain on our flocks and herds." The opposition of a number of the smaller freeholders was referred to. This was sufficient to delay action until 1745 when the recovery of wool prices and the cattle plague gave added strength to the arguments of those advocating partition.

In such parishes as these, we notice that the small landowner, as a class, remained significant, being in possession of between 33 and 36 per cent of the land coming under 73 enclosure awards drawn up between 1750 and 1789. Village society remained here closely knit; the unifying factor of family relationship cut across the dividing lines of occupation, status, and income. The long-standing village families provided generation after generation of church and parish officers, in the same way that the gentry and squires furnished the unpaid administration of the hundred and county. In freehold society, furthermore, it was the neighbourhood, rather than the village or parish, which formed the unit of family relations, and sometimes of ownership also.⁴

¹ For a detailed examination of the relationship between enclosure and population growth in Warwickshire, see J. M. Martin, 'Warwickshire and the Parliamentary Enclosure Movement', *loc. cit.*, Vol. I, Chapter x. Also Vol. II, Appendices xxxv-xli. An article based on this material will be published in the near future.

² Two Alveston freeholders received special mention from the Board of Agriculture Reporter in 1794, for "zeal in improvement."—J. Wedge, *A General View of the Agriculture of Warwickshire*, 1794.

³ A photostat of this document is now in Warwick C.R.O. It is entitled 'The Case Stated for the Enclosure of Flecknoe Field', 1730, Ref. Z/12.

⁴ This is one of the weaknesses of using Land Tax Returns which has not perhaps received the attention it deserves.

Enclosure awards offer a number of examples of such families, but one will suffice. The Mann family was centred on the 'open' parishes of Napton and Harbury. The name first appears in the parish register of Harbury in 1569, and there are several families of varying economic status mentioned in the Hearth Tax Return of 1663. In the eighteenth century nine families of this name received allotments under the awards of five neighbouring parishes totalling in all 555 acres. The size of common-field estates allotted to the Manns under these awards ranged from 195 to 5 acres. More than one received land in two parishes.

From the 1780's the character of the Parliamentary enclosure movement changed again, under the influence of a growing food market and sharply rising land prices.¹ Now it was the turn of the great overcrowded 'open' parishes. Though land ownership in these parishes remained widely dispersed amongst a multitude of small owners, big landlords had, in a number of cases, secured a substantial foothold. The impoverished state of husbandry in this type of parish is reflected in the very low rental value of the land prior to enclosure and the enormous increase which occurred as a consequence. Below we illustrate this point from the post-enclosure rise in the rental value of land in the parish of Napton.² The increase in land value was here due not only to the enclosure of 1779, but also to the subsequent cutting of the Napton and Warwick Canal, a further demonstration of the influence of the expanding food market.

TABLE X

CHANGE IN THE RENTAL VALUE OF LAND IN PARISH OF NAPTON, 1735-1835

<i>Napton</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Land valuation</i>	<i>% rise in value</i>	<i>Average value of land per acre</i>
(Enclosed 1779, Parish acreage 4,027 acres)	1735	£1,148	206 264	5.5/-
	1779	£3,512		17.4/- (post-enclosure)
	1835	£9,300		46.4/-

Such parishes offered great obstacles to enclosure, and it is not surprising that it was delayed here until the end of the century. Furthermore, they were

¹ For some signs of the growing demand for landed estates in the Midlands, and the considerable building activity which was a consequence, see J. M. Martin, 'Social and Economic Trends in the Rural West Midlands, 1785-1825', unpublished M.Com. thesis in Birmingham University Library, Chapters III, IV, and Appendices.

² These figures are taken from the valuations recorded in Rate Books of Parish Overseers of the Poor in Warwick C.R.O.

frequently inaccessible, and enclosure was then necessarily coupled with expensive road and bridge construction schemes.¹

In spite of the difficulties and the expense involved,² such underdeveloped parishes offered rewards to the man with capital during the last decades of the eighteenth century.³ Thus the movement came once again largely into the hands of the big landowner who already had a foothold, or of the speculator from outside the parish. It was in these parishes, as we shall see, that the most striking post-enclosure changes probably took place. It was recognized that not only would the value of the great estate be increased by partition of the common fields, but that opportunities for its enlargement would be greatly enhanced. Enclosure was a means of putting pressure not only on smaller freeholders but also on those holding leases for life or for long terms of years. The latter were encouraged, as at Brailes in 1787, to surrender their leases and accept annuities "not wishing to burden themselves with the great expense of an enclosure."⁴

Examples of common-field parishes which in these years attracted outsiders were Wolvey and Little Compton.

TABLE XI

THE PURCHASE AND SALE OF LANDED ESTATES IN PARISHES ENCLOSED, 1794-5

<i>Parish</i>	<i>Seller</i>	<i>Purchaser</i>	<i>Description of estate</i>	<i>Purchase date</i>	<i>Award date</i>	<i>Resale date</i>
Wolvey	Earl of Coventry	J. Foster, Esq.	First manor, second manor, & estate of 664 acres	1780 1794	1794	—
Little Compton		M. Corgan, Esq., of Enstone, Oxon.	Manor & estate of 1,073 acres	1793	1795	1815

Common-fields left over until the nineteenth century in Warwickshire were comparatively few. As we see from the landownership tables, they were, in general, already in the hands of great landowners, and large-scale tenant-

¹ 'Warwickshire and the Parliamentary Enclosure Movement', *loc. cit.*, Vol. 1, Chapter VIII.

² Between the 1730's and 1780's the average cost per acre of enclosure trebled in Warwickshire.—J. M. Martin, 'The Cost of Parliamentary Enclosure in Warwickshire', *University of Birmingham Hist. Jnl.*, ix, 2, 1964.

³ These did not always involve reorganized farming. The preamble to the award of Chilvers Coton, 1774, stated that enclosure was a necessary preliminary to an extension of the coalfield.

⁴ Another example was the enclosure of Kenilworth, where pressure was put on the unusually large number of copyholders and leaseholders for life.

farmers. The area of land remaining in an open state was usually small, and since most of the parish land was already improved and high-rented, we can imagine that comparatively little gain would accrue to the landowner from a private act. Temple Grafton, enclosed in 1815, was such a parish. It was already largely enclosed by the first decades of the eighteenth century, and by the award date the parish was in the hands of four great landowners. Even in the later seventeenth century, when the assessment to the land-tax was made, the rental value of the land was high.

Many enclosures, however, taking place from the later eighteenth century onwards related to Arden Forest parishes. Though more numerous at that date than has sometimes been supposed,¹ those common fields were small and of secondary importance to the vast areas of surrounding waste and woodland. Partition of these fields went on continuously throughout the eighteenth century, often without the commotion associated with those in the Felden and without recourse to Parliament. Not infrequently landownership in these parishes was found to be minutely divided. This was an argument for delay. The fragmentation of landownership in such parishes is illustrated in the awards as we demonstrate in the table below:

TABLE XII

ALLOTMENT OF LAND IN 13 ARDEN FOREST COMMON-FIELD AWARDS

<i>Total acreage</i>	<i>Total acreage allotted to owners of over 10 and under 100 acres</i>	<i>Total acreage allotted to owners of under 100 acres</i>
11,489 acres	5,607 acres, i.e. 48·8%	6,394 acres, i.e. 55·6%

This picture of landownership structure in the Arden receives strength from other sources. The most numerous body of freeholders voting in the Coventry election of 1774 were drawn from the Forest parishes, and certain 'open' Felden parishes. From the Forest parishes of Tanworth and Kenilworth, 62 and 69 freeholders respectively, voted in that year.² The assessments to the eighteenth-century land-tax paint a similar picture as we see from the selection given in Table XIII (p. 32).

¹ For example, the present writer came across evidence, quite by chance, of the survival of common fields in the eighteenth century in the two Arden parishes of Upper Whitacre and Stoneleigh. Neither had, apparently, been previously recorded, and they were presumably enclosed without resort to Parliament. There may well have been other sets of common fields elsewhere in the Arden.

² See the Coventry Poll Book published at Coventry, 1775, now in Warwick C.R.O.

TABLE XIII

THE STRUCTURE OF ARDEN LANDOWNERSHIP AS REFLECTED IN LAND-TAX RETURNS

<i>Parish</i>	<i>Total owners paying tax 1780</i>	<i>Total owners paying over 10s. tax in 1780</i>
Tanworth	150	100
Allesley	63	37
Fillongley	63	53
Barston	55	39
Lapworth	49	42

The shaping of this characteristic form of landownership structure has been traced in the medieval Arden.¹ Here the social consequences of enclosure of the common fields were probably less painful. Nevertheless, there is evidence of consolidation of these smallholdings by 1825. In Tanworth, for example, the total number of owners paying over 10s. tax had been reduced from 100 to 76.

When we consider the question of owner-occupation we find that this varied also from period to period and was affected by the character of enclosure. As we would perhaps expect, it was most prevalent during the period 1750-79.

TABLE XIV

OWNER-OCCUPATION IN VARIOUS CATEGORIES OF PARISH IN 1780

<i>Type of parish</i>	<i>Number of parishes</i>	<i>Total landowners</i>	<i>Owner-occupiers</i>	
			<i>Numbers</i>	<i>Proportion of total (%)</i>
Old-enclosed	56	453	106	23
Enclosed 1730-79	30	881	502	58
Enclosed 1780-99	13	445	209	47
Enclosed 1800-22	9	223	66	30

If we compare this picture with that offered by the land-tax returns of 1825, then a significant correlation can be detected. It is precisely where the great landowners and tenant-farmers were strongest at the earlier date, that

¹ R. H. Hilton, *Social Structure of Rural Warwickshire in the Middle Ages*, Dugdale Society Occasional Papers, no. 9, 1950.

the number of occupiers increased by 1825. On the other hand, where freehold society remained fairly strong in 1780, the number of owners declined, and owner-occupiers saw a considerable decline in numbers.

TABLE XV
OWNER-OCCUPATION IN VARIOUS CATEGORIES OF PARISH IN 1825

<i>Type of parish</i>	<i>Number of parishes</i>	<i>Total landowners</i>	<i>Owner-occupiers</i>	
			<i>Numbers</i>	<i>Proportion of total (%)</i>
Old-enclosed	56	437	147	34
Enclosed 1730-79	30	571	250	44
Enclosed 1780-99	13	338	132	34
Enclosed 1800-22	11	164	77	47

Examples of parishes in the hands of great landowners and tenant-farmers where owner-occupation was on the increase include Birdingbury and Marton where, under the award of the year 1804 dealing with the whole parish, three-quarters of the land went to 2 owners, and owner-occupiers increased between 1780 and 1825 from 5 to 9. An increase was seen at Temple Grafton, described above. At Fenny Compton, where the increase was from 5 to 7, one of the newcomers was William Payne, a leading tenant-farmer.

This question of owner-occupation is usually considered from the point of view of the small landowner. The increase in this form of ownership may have been less a sign of the continuing prosperity of the ancient freeholder than of the successful extension of large-scale tenant-farming. It also reflected a tendency for landowners, after 1790, to cultivate part of their own land. This conclusion is further strengthened by signs that the size of individual owner-occupied estates was increasing (a fact remarked upon by E. Davies), and by the purchase of exemption from the land-tax.

Freedom from this tax required the down-payment of a sum equal to about 30 years' purchase, and presupposed a considerable sum of money in hand. The new owner-occupiers described above would be more likely to avail themselves of this opportunity than ancient freeholders. By 1825, 30 per cent of 1,434 landowners in 65 parishes had purchased their freedom from this obligation, an average of 6.6 owners in each parish. Over a third of those so exempted in Warwickshire were owner-occupiers assessed at less than £10 tax, as shown in Table XVI (p. 34).

It appears from the landownership tables that in many parishes the small

TABLE XVI

EXEMPTION OF LANDOWNERS FROM PAYMENT OF LAND-TAX BY 1825

<i>Total parishes examined</i>	<i>Total owners</i>	<i>Total exempted</i>	<i>Exempted owner-occupiers</i>	<i>Owner-occupiers paying under £10</i>
65	1,434	432	157	148

landowners, considered as a class, were, at the time of the enclosure, in a strong position both in respect of their share of the land, and numerically. As in Leicestershire, there is little evidence that large-scale engrossing of estates preceded Parliamentary enclosure where this took place after 1750. The average number of landowners was upwards of 25 in most parishes undergoing the process. This was in sharp contrast to the situation in a large group of old-enclosed parishes. In 1780 some 35 out of 56 of these had no owner-occupiers at all, while 44 per cent of the land-tax was paid by owners contributing over £100 and owning 1,500 acres or more.

We can now turn to consider how the small landowner fared as a consequence of enclosure. In general, his fortunes seem to have varied once again, depending on the locality, and the period. There were certainly some parishes, particularly along the valley of the Avon and its tributaries, where the small owner held his own after the disappearance of the common fields. This was true, for example, in the parishes of Brinklow, Aston Cantlow, Haselor, Cubbington, and Snitterfield. As we have already emphasized, this was probably connected with post-enclosure land use. Particular circumstances in other parishes enabled the freeholder to flourish after enclosure. For example, in the parish of Willoughby, many small freeholders divided up amongst themselves the large estate of Magdalen College, Oxford, which they farmed on highly favourable long-term leases. At the date of enclosure, some 13 leaseholders divided up this estate in lots of about one yardland. As

TABLE XVII

LANDOWNERSHIP STRUCTURE IN THE PARISH OF WILLOUGHBY, 1780-1825

<i>Date</i>	<i>Landowners holding</i>					
	<i>50-100 acres</i>		<i>10-50 acres</i>		<i>10-100 acres</i>	
	<i>No.</i>	<i>Acreage</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>Acreage</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>Acreage</i>
1780	5	329	9	251	14	580
1825	7	512	7	204	14	716

a consequence, the position of the small landowner was strengthened between 1780 and 1825 as the land-tax returns show.

At Aston Cantlow the freeholders continued to carry out enclosure of the considerable waste land in the parish, after the award of 1742.¹ In the parish of Oxhill enclosure could not weaken the dominant hold of the resident freeholders on the parish lands, established long before when the lord's lands passed into their hands.² In contrast, other parishes, particularly those situated in the south-east, may have seen a decline in the strength of the small landowner, both in respect of numbers and of his share of the land. This was particularly noticeable between 1780 and 1825 in the 'open' parishes like Napton (where they declined from 34 to 22), Harbury (from 27 to 15), and Brailes (from 30 to 18).

If we consider those parishes which underwent Parliamentary enclosure as a group, the land-tax returns can give us some idea of how the small landowner fared. Though a comparison of landownership as recorded in awards and land-tax cannot be made with accuracy, it seems likely in a number of instances that his share of the land had declined between enclosure and the returns of 1780. This trend seems to have continued between 1780 and 1825, though it appears to have been most noticeable in parishes enclosed in the interval between the two assessments. Thus, in 27 parishes enclosed within that period, the share of the small landowner seems to have declined by as much as a third. At the same time, that of proprietors in possession of 500 acres and more rose quite markedly from 10,890 acres in 1780 to 14,786 acres in 1825.

TABLE XVIII

THE STRENGTH OF OWNERS IN POSSESSION OF BETWEEN 4 AND 100 ACRES
IN 1780 AND 1825

<i>Award date</i>	<i>No. of parishes</i>	<i>Acreage equivalent 1780</i>	<i>% share 1780</i>	<i>Acreage equivalent 1825</i>	<i>% share 1825</i>
1726-59	13	5,883	23	4,389	18
1760-9	11	4,915	19	4,286	16
1770-9	12	6,822	25	6,228	22
1780-1802	27	14,322	25	9,751	17

¹ See J. M. Martin, 'Warwickshire and the Parliamentary Enclosure Movement', *loc. cit.*, Vol. I, Chapter IV.

² "There is no Lord of the Manor, but divers freeholders do Inheritt the Towne," said Sir S. Archer in 1625.—*V.C.H. Warwickshire*, III, p. 125. Similarly, the strength of the yeomanry at Haselor can be traced to the granting of eleven leases, virtually as favourable as freeholds, by the Throckmortons in the early seventeenth century.—*Ibid.*, III, p. 113.

Information from other sources lends strength to the view that the numbers of small landowners not infrequently declined during the period of enclosure, at least in the 'open' parishes partitioned after 1779. Though not perhaps of regular occurrence, many freeholders were bought out prior to the enclosures of Hunningham, Kenilworth, Binton, Easington, and Long Compton.¹ In addition, some 55, or about half the Warwickshire awards, contain references to the purchase of estates which occurred in the interval between the application for the Act and the drawing up of the award. This involved the buying up of over 200 estates, including 221 yardlands so-named, a large number of cottage-commons, and of tithe converted to land at the time of enclosure. One should add that perhaps this change in the ownership of land is no more than one would expect to have taken place while the enclosure was under negotiation. The pace of change quickened after 1789, as we see below.

TABLE XIX

THE PURCHASE OF LANDED ESTATES BETWEEN PASSING OF THE ACT AND THE AWARD

<i>Period of award</i>	<i>Estates bought up</i>	<i>Total acreage</i>
1750-69	37	1,303
1770-89	35	685
1790-1815	68	2,415
After 1815	66	3,205

Examples of parishes where extensive transfers of land took place are Radway, where enclosure in the 1750's was accompanied by the sale of 11 yardlands belonging to 10 freeholders; of Easington (1797), where 25 yardlands were sold up by 11 freeholders to 3 large proprietors; and of Long Compton (1812), where Lord Northampton received an estate of 1,596 acres in lieu of 50 yardlands of his own land and 21 yardlands "lately bought" of 10 named men. In the nineteenth century, land purchase was considerable at the enclosures of Nether Whitacre, Wolverton, Burmington, Woolford, and Winderton.

The conversion of tithe payments into land also contributed towards the consolidation of the great estate, and the consequent decline of the small landowner. The opportunity to make this change was almost universally taken at the time of enclosure in Warwickshire. This not only greatly

¹ Evidence of considerable purchase of estates in Hunningham and Kenilworth by Lord Leigh is in Leigh MS., Birthplace Trust Library, Stratford, Series C.5, Bundles 2-7; Series C.6, Bundles 2 and 3. For Binton see *V.C.H. Warwickshire*, III, p. 62. For Easington and Long Compton evidence is furnished by the land-tax returns prior to enclosure.

strengthened the large landowner but also benefited the new class of tenant farmer. In 113 awards covering 146,160 acres, no less than 25,538 acres were transferred in lieu of tithe payments: that is to say, 17·4 per cent of the total common field and common land enclosed by private Act was given up to recompense tithe owners. More than half of this total, i.e. 13,513 acres, went to lay proprietors and not to the Church at all.

Within the class of great proprietors owning estates of above 300 acres, ownership of common-field land dealt with by the awards was fairly widely dispersed, and the peerage as a body received only a small part of the total unenclosed land. If we exclude some thousands of acres allotted to the Church, then the peerage received 22,928 acres or 15 per cent of the total; a further 13,973 acres or 10 per cent was allotted to baronets, and 11,973 acres or 8 per cent to a variety of institutions.

The main body of estate owners who launched, and who often benefited by enclosure, were esquires and leading gentry resident in the county from the seventeenth century. Newcomers from the professions, trade, and industry had comparatively little influence in initiating enclosure, although they became of increasing importance as landowners from the early nineteenth century.¹

The decline of the small landowner was not always to the advantage of the great landowner, however. Particularly is this true of parishes where freeholders remained important at the time of enclosure. In these communities a differentiation within the class of freeholders seems to have occurred, as a consequence perhaps of enclosure. Those who were willing and able to take advantage of the partition of the common fields to cultivate cash crops showed no signs of decline between enclosure and 1825. Some of the land of their smaller neighbours came into their hands. Such men also took advantage of leaseholds and tenancies where these were being created on the new tithe farms and the newly consolidated estates. Table XX (p. 38), based on awards and land-tax assessments, illustrates the continuing prosperity of freeholders in possession of about 100 to 199 acres. Though their numbers may have fallen, their share of the land probably increased after enclosure.

As an illustration of the way in which the substantial freeholder clung to his share of the land in the face of great changes in landownership, we must look again at the parish of Wolfhamcote. It consisted of 3,855 acres in three hamlets. Socially it was a parish of freeholders. There were 85 households in 1663 and 95 by 1730. Between this date and 1801 the population declined

¹ 'Warwickshire and the Parliamentary Enclosure Movement', *loc. cit.*, Vol. I, Chapters v and vi.

TABLE XX

THE SUBSTANTIAL FREEHOLDER AS LANDOWNER

<i>At enclosure</i>				<i>In land-tax returns</i>			
				1780		1825	
<i>No. of awards</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Acreage received</i>	<i>Share of total</i>	<i>Date of enclosure</i>	<i>Share of total</i>	<i>Date of enclosure</i>	<i>Share of total</i>
35	1750-69	5,980	15%	1750-69	21%	1750-69	21%
38	1770-89	7,827	18%	1770-99	19%	1770-99	20%
				1800-15	15%	1800-15	13%

following the partition of most of the parish under awards of 1745 and 1757 and the conversion of the open fields to pasture. A comparison of the state of landownership at the time of the two enclosures and later is given below.

TABLE XXI

LANDOWNERSHIP CHANGES IN WOLFHAMCOTE, 1745-1825

<i>Source</i>	<i>Estate size</i>						
	<i>Owners in possession of</i>						
	<i>Over 500 acres</i>	<i>300-499 acres</i>	<i>200-299 acres</i>	<i>100-199 acres</i>	<i>50-99 acres</i>	<i>10-49 acres</i>	<i>Under 10 acres</i>
Two enclosure awards, 1745 and 1757	1/613	—	3/745	9/1,065	7/550	21/544	10/49
Land-tax 1780	2/1,606	—	—	10/1,260	8/612	16/406	11/72
1825	1/899	2/665	2/559	8/1,147	6/459	10/249	5/31

The small landowners lost much ground between the awards and 1825; their numbers shrank from 28 to 16, and their share fell by over one-third. We notice, however, that the substantial freeholder in possession of between 100 and 199 acres was the most significant class of owner at the time of the awards, and remained remarkably firm during the subsequent 70 years. The 250 per cent increase in the share of land possessed by owners of over 300 acres was not achieved at the expense of this class of owner.

Thus, to summarize our main conclusions: it is clear that even within Warwickshire Parliamentary enclosure had a varied character and meant

quite different things in different localities and in different periods. Freeholders often remained an important group at the time of enclosure, and the small landowner continued to hold a significant share of the land. The evidence suggests that whether enclosure resulted in the decline of the small landowner depended on the locality and the period. After 1779, when 'open' parishes came to be enclosed, there may have been a substantial loss to this class of owner. In a number of parishes the decline of the small landowner may not necessarily have benefited the great landowner but have helped the substantial freeholders who were sometimes responsible for securing a private Act in the first instance. The increase of owner-occupation after 1790 did not necessarily indicate continuing prosperity for the small landowner, since it seems to have been most noticeable in parishes long in the hands of big landowners and substantial tenant-farmers. The commutation of tithe for land was an important factor in the transference of landownership to the large landowner. It seems likely that the launching of the Parliamentary enclosure movement was mainly done on the initiative of that class of substantial local gentry resident in the county since the seventeenth century, and newcomers probably played little part in this. The former, and not the members of the peerage or baronetcy, were, apart from substantial freeholders, the main beneficiaries of the changes wrought on the land.

In the Arden, Parliamentary enclosure caused less upheaval, and was often delayed until the end of the eighteenth century. Many common fields survived in North Warwickshire until the Parliamentary era, but a large number were partitioned without resort to Parliament. Landownership was, in many of these parishes, widely dispersed amongst a large number of small proprietors, and the awards and land-tax assessments clearly reflect this structure of ownership.

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