

The Enclosure and Reclamation of the Mendip Hills, 1770-1870

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INTRODUCTION

THE subject of the enclosure and reclamation of the 'wastes' of the country has received relatively little attention. Most research work on enclosure has been concentrated upon the question of the enclosure of the commonable arable fields and the social and economic consequences that ensued. There have been exceptions, of course: the work of Hoskins on Devon and Orwin on Exmoor in Somerset are important reminders of the type and abundance of evidence that exists about the changes which occurred in these waste lands. And more recently, the work of Harris on the East Riding of Yorkshire has delineated some of the important points and patterns of enclosure and reclamation on the Wolds. But, generally speaking, we know little about the extent and effect of enclosure and reclamation on the hitherto waste areas.¹

The purpose of this paper is to look at the enclosure and reclamation of one local area, the Mendip Hills in Somerset. Between 1770 and the end of the nineteenth century, 144,369 acres of land, previously considered to be waste or commonable pasture, were enclosed by Parliamentary Act throughout Somerset. The Mendip enclosures accounted for about 17·7 per cent of the total land affected, most of the remainder being in the lowland floodable levels (41·4 per cent), the uplands of Exmoor (30·7 per cent), and the chalk Blackdown Hills along the southern border of the county (8·1 per cent) (see inset, FIGURE I). Although the amount of land affected by Parliamentary Act in the Mendips is small when compared with the amount in other parts of the county the reclamation commands attention because it was distinctive in many ways, and because it is well documented through the writing of John Billingsley, who wrote the County Agricultural Report in 1797 and was an energetic advocate of reclamation and enclosure, both as a writer and as a practical farmer.

THE SETTING FOR RECLAMATION AND ENCLOSURE

The Mendip Hills are a distinctive regional unit, most of which consists of carboniferous limestone which is over 600 feet, and much of which forms a remarkably uniform plateau of between 800 and 900 feet. Several inliers of old

¹ See W. G. Hoskins, 'The Reclamation of the Waste in Devon, 1550-1800', *Econ. Hist. Rev.*, 13, 1943, pp. 80-92; C. S. Orwin, *The Reclamation of Exmoor Forest*, 1929; A. Harris, *The Rural Landscape of the East Riding of Yorkshire, 1700-1850*, 1961.

red sandstone swell up above the general plateau surface and give rise to land in excess of 900 feet. The central plateau is bleak and the soils shallow, and despite an average annual rainfall that exceeds 50 inches in places there is little surface water because of percolation.

In 1791, Collinson described the desolate pre-enclosure landscape that existed above Wells: "In many parts there is very little depth of earth, the rocks rising above the turf, which, however, affords good pasture for sheep and young cattle. The surface in other parts is covered with heath, fern, and furze. The air, especially in winter, is moist, thick, and foggy, and so very cold that frost and snow inhabit these heights longer than they do almost any other parts of the county; and the few remaining trees, their leaves blasted and discoloured by the severe winds from the Channel, never attain to any considerable size."¹

Before enclosure most settlement had ringed the plateau and was situated on the lower sheltered and warmer soils of the fringes. A plot of the villages and individual houses from Day and Master's map of 1782 shows this clearly and further reveals only two significant clusters of habitation on the plateau, at Charterhouse and Priddy, some of this settlement being associated with lead-mining, the working of which, over the centuries, had pitted and scarred the plateau surface. There was also some settlement on the eastern portion of the plateau beyond Wells, where it narrowed and was slightly less exposed (see FIG. I).

Each of the major nucleated settlements in the "fine rural vales"² that ringed the Mendips obtained a portion of the marginal lands of the plateau, their claim being based on ancient stocking rights exercised on the waste. Ubley was the first settlement to enclose its part of the plateau in 1771, followed by Doultling in 1775. During the years from 1782 to 1797 each of the other settlements did the same.³

After 1797, only the enclosures of Cheddar (no. 33, 1811) and, one hundred years later, Burrington (no. 161, 1911) were concerned with the main body of the Mendips and the remainder of the enclosures were on the outliers of carboniferous limestone to the north, at Wrington and Long Ashton Downs.⁴

From FIGURE I it can be seen that the greatest part of the area affected by enclosure was above 700 feet and on the exposed plateau top, a relationship which

¹ J. Collinson, *The History and Antiquities of the County of Somerset*, III, Bath, 1791, p. 374.

² *Ibid.*, p. 587.

³ The details of the extent of land enclosed are taken from the maps which accompany the enclosure awards for these parishes, and represent the actual area involved. These awards are in the Somerset Record Office, Taunton, and each reference is followed by the Record Office numeration and the date of the Act. Those affecting the Mendips are: Ubley (no. 62, 1771); Doultling (no. 58, 1775); Shepton Mallet (no. 27, 1782); Wookey (no. 134, 1782); Blagdon (no. 132, 1784); West Harptree (no. 18, 1787); Compton Martin (no. 71, 1788); the Mendip portion of Bleadon (no. 22, 1788); Croscombe and Dinder (no. 72, 1792); Wells (no. 73, 1792 and no. 81, 1793); East Harptree (no. 65, 1794); Cheddar (no. 38, 1795); Shipham and Winscombe (no. 13, 1797), and Chewton Mendip (no. 23, 1797).

⁴ Wrington (no. 124, 1810); Backwell (no. 6, 1807); Long Ashton (no. 119, 1813).

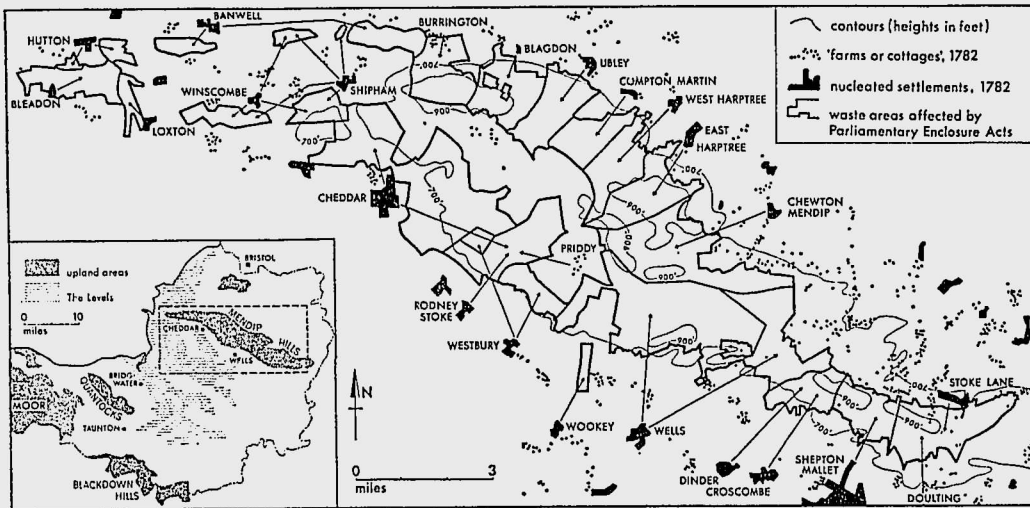


FIG. I

Somerset and the Mendip Hills. (Based on enclosure awards and maps, Somerset Record Office, Taunton; Day and Masters' map of *The County of Somerset*, 1792)

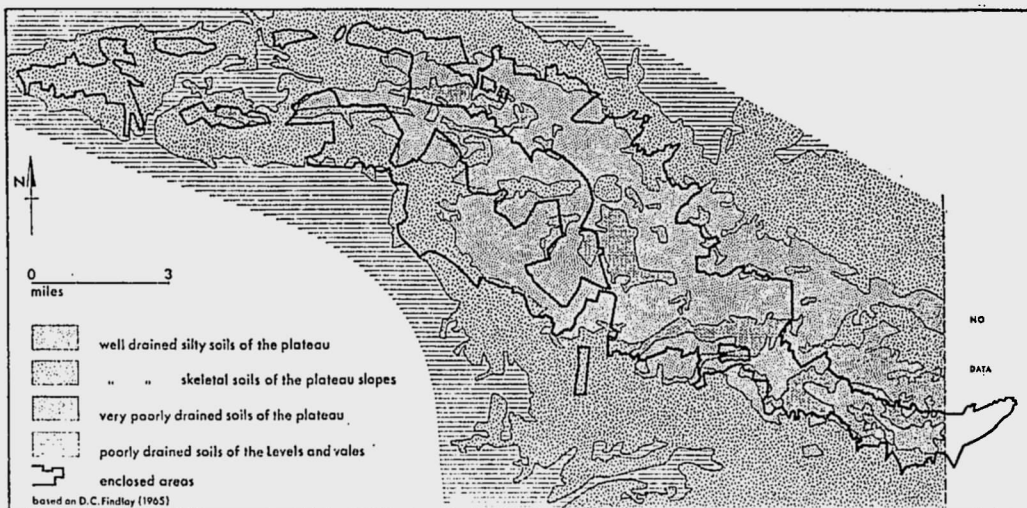


FIG. II

The soils of the Mendip Hills and surrounding areas. (The well-drained silty soils of the plateau include the Nordach, Mendip Complex, Maesbury, and Ellich Series; the well-drained, but shallow, skeletal soils of the plateau slopes include the Lulsgate, Wrington, and Stone Easton Series; the very poorly drained soils of the plateau include the Priddy, Ashen, Thruppe, and Coalpit Heath Complex Series; and the poorly drained soils of the Levels and the vales include the Wentlloog, Allerton, and other Series. Based on D. C. Findlay, 1965. See p. 68, fn. 1.)

becomes more striking when the contemporary private enclosures, lying between Shipham and Priddy in the centre of the plateau, are taken into consideration. There were two main exceptions to this however: on the gentler slopes above Cheddar and on the blocks of high ground which mark the break-up of the main mass of the Mendips, westwards towards Brean Down. On these western upland blocks, open waste land was located at much lower altitudes than on the plateau because of greater exposure to the sea and because of shallower, rockier soils, developed on the steep slopes.

The distribution of soil types is closely associated with the morphological aspect of the region, and soil type is a sensitive indicator to early reclamation endeavour, the relatively easily ploughed loams being the locale of the new colonization of the Hills in the late eighteenth century (see FIGURE II). These easily worked loams consist of four soil series, all of which have a similar profile and morphology, although developed on different parent material. They constitute a part of a major soil group, the Brown Earths. The 800-foot plateau and the area of the lower, 300-400-foot plateau near Chewton Mendip and Emborough are covered by these free-draining Brown Earths, mainly of the Nordach Series which is a silty, dark-brown soil of up to 30 inches in depth. It can be slightly to moderately acid in its reaction. The Nordach Series merges into the shallower, and sometimes stonier, soil of the Mendip Complex, mainly in the vicinity of Priddy and the northern and southern edges of the plateau. In other places, on the Old Red Sandstone inliers above 900 feet, soils of the Maesbury and Ellick Series have developed, and they are very similar to the Nordach soils in that they are silty and free-draining, but different in that they are moderately to very acid.

Around the edge of the plateau, in steep valleys and particularly on the fretted western extremity of the plateau, are more free-draining soils of the Lulsgate, Wrington, and Stone Easton Series which were not attractive for reclamation, being very shallow and stoney. These skeletal soils have remained as areas of rough grazing, particularly on the western blocks of enclosure. Entirely different from all these soils are the patches of poorly drained, peaty, gleyed podzols of the Priddy and Ashen Series which are found interspersed with the Nordach Series on the plateau top. These are spongy black soils underlain by a rusty-coloured horizon of iron enrichment. The Thruppe Series and Coalpit Heath Complex are similar in their poor drainage. These soils were difficult to cultivate because of their surface wetness, the iron pan, and their great acidity. Finally, the whole of the soils of the plateau and its fringes were surrounded by the ground-water gley soils of the Levels to the south and west and the Yeo and Chew valleys to the north.¹

¹ For further information, see D. C. Findlay, *The Soils of the Mendip District of Somerset*, Memoirs of the Soil Survey of Great Britain, H.M.S.O., 1965.

Enclosure, of course, transformed the landscape of the plateau. The open sheep-walks disappeared, and were subdivided by hedges and fences into a regular network of fields. New farmsteads were established and new crops were introduced. Phelps in 1839 said that the enclosures had quite "altered the aspect of the forest. Farm homes have been built and an increasing population is spreading itself, roads communicating with different towns and villages round its base intersect this once dreary mountain in various parts, affording an easy access to it. Arable husbandry predominates wherever the soil will admit the plough, and fine crops of barley, oats, and in more favoured spots, wheat, are grown. Turnips and other vegetables capable of resisting the ordinary winter frosts, thrive well."¹ It is these elements of the new and changing landscape of the plateau that will now be examined in detail.

CHANGING LAND USE

Writing in 1794, Billingsley accurately distinguished between the two main soils of the plateau which he described as "for the most part deep, loamy and of a good consistence" and elsewhere as "a fine yellow mould," although occasionally there were to be found "spots of land less valuable, being of a light spongy nature, black in colour and totally unproductive of corn on the first cultivation."² He seems to be referring to the Nordach and Priddy series respectively.

Both soils presented problems, and a great deal of preparatory labour and capital investment were needed before they could be cultivated successfully. The paring and burning of turf was a long-standing West Country technique for the colonization of new land and although it had never been practised in the Mendips, it became a widely advocated answer to the problem of preparing the loams and the black moulds for cultivation during the late eighteenth century. But paring and burning was not the total answer to these soils; their acidity could be counteracted only by liming. By extensive and laborious experiments, accompanied by careful accounting, Billingsley was able to demonstrate the superiority of liming over paring and burning on his own Mendip land.³ The various stages suggested and carried out by Billingsley in preparing the Nordach Series soils either for cultivation or for improved pasture are perhaps best summarized in tabular form, together with his estimate of the cost of each operation on each acre of average land.

¹ W. Phelps, *The History and Antiquities of Somersetshire*, London, 1839, II, pp. 7-8.

² J. Billingsley, *A General View of the Agriculture of Somerset*, 2nd edn, 1798, p. 77. Pages 17-141 of Billingsley's book deal with aspects of the new Mendip farming, and great use is made of this material throughout this paper, but no reference is made to the *General View* unless specific quotations are taken from it.

³ J. Billingsley, 'Account of the Culture of Carrots; and Thoughts on Burn-baiting on Mendip-hills', *Letters and Papers of the Bath and West of England Society*, I, 1788, pp. 214-19; J. Billingsley, 'On the Culture of Potatoes', *Annals of Agriculture*, XXI, 1793, pp. 1-32.

	£	s.	d.
Removing rocks, clearing stones, levelling, burning furze	15	0	
First ploughing	1	1	0
Second cross-ploughing	18	0	
Dragging	8	0	
First harrowing	3	0	
Liming at 160 bushels per acre	2	10	0
Spreading lime	2	0	
Second harrowing	1	6	
Rolling	1	0	
Third ploughing	5	0	
Third harrowing	1	6	
Rolling	1	0	
Fourth ploughing	5	0	
	£6	12	0 ¹

If the above thorough scheme of reclamation was carried out by Billingsley, then there was every justification for the claim made for him that he had ploughed and reploughed his 3,000 or 4,000 acres of land four or five times, and that he had spread 500,000 bushels of lime on it.²

These methods of improvement were tedious, expensive, and above all, ineffectual on the soils of the Priddy series. On this soil, paring and burning were a useful beginning, and with the spreading of lime some improvement was possible. But the hard clay pan at about 6 to 8 inches below the black humus silt still impeded drainage and had to be broken up. One method used widely before deep-ploughing became common, was to shallow-plough and harrow the land, then throw it into a series of mounds and gutters to expose the rust-coloured iron pan. The land could then be either planted to potatoes or let out to potato-growers; the clay was pulverized by pick-axe or mattock and thrown up on to the mounds of black silt thereby giving them some tenacity. The total operation was calculated to cost £15 an acre, but this did not take into account the return from the potatoes, which could equal or exceed the costs of improvement. The next season the alternative areas were selected for gutters or mounds, so that over the course of a few years the whole of the pan was broken, and the soil turned and mixed.³

¹ J. Billingsley, 'An Essay on Waste Lands', *Letters to the Bath and West of England Agricultural Society*, XI, 1807, pp. 43-7 (hereafter J. Billingsley, *Waste Lands*).

² Editorial comment appended to an article by J. Billingsley, 'Remarks on the Utility of the Bath and West Society with an Account of the Progress and Improvements in the County of Somerset', *Letters to the Bath and West of England Agricultural Society*, x, 1805, p. 246.

³ Findlay, *op. cit.*, 1965, p. 54, comments on the modification of the Priddy soils by cultivation and suggests that they may have been far more extensive than present mapping indicates. For comments on the reclamation of East Cranmore Common, see Billingsley, *General View*, p. 77.

Ideally, a mixed farming system would have been best for the Mendips, and Billingsley's advice was "to provide all necessary buildings for shelter in the winter, and for the purposes of making mountains of dung" and to the farmer "to grow but little corn and that little in the highest perfection; to have breadth of turnips, cabbages, vetches, artificial grasses" and consequently "to maintain a great stock" of sheep, cattle, pigs, and poultry.¹ Unfortunately the course taken was the reverse of these wise suggestions; allotments were assigned to farms in the vales and the Levels, and farmers took six or seven crops of grain in succession, a 'rotation' of wheat, oats, oats, oats, fallow, wheat, oats, being common. One farmer, in 1851, after taking three crops of oats in succession from one field was still saying that he would "take as many oat crops as the land would bear first . . . then lime it, and take only two crops as he wished to lay it down to grass in good heart!"² It was sheer exploitation which beggared the plateau soils to such an extent that some landlords restricted ploughing, even going so far as to limit tenants to grazing alone.³

Some indication of cropping in the parishes in the vicinity of the Mendips is given in TABLE I. It is based on the Agriculture Returns of 1801 for Somerset. Not all parishes were covered by the Returns, and in the Mendips those for Priddy, Charterhouse, Westbury, and Ashwick in particular, are missing. Nor

TABLE I
PERCENTAGE OF LAND IN CROPS, 1801

Parish	Total acreage	Wheat W	Barley B	Oats O	Potatoes Po	Peas Pe	Beans B	Turnips and Rape	Crop combination
Rowbarrow	40	32.5	—	55.0	12.5	—	—	—	W O
Blagdon	1,240	64.8	0.4	27.4	4.8	0.3	0.5	1.6	W O
Wells	1,533	33.9	5.7	48.7	9.4	2.0	2.6	0.4	W O
Shepton Mallet	101	21.8	6.9	61.3	4.9	4.9	—	—	W O B
West Harptree	267	18.7	2.2	56.2	14.9	0.3	—	7.4	W O Po
East Harptree	367	19.6	4.0	64.8	11.5	—	—	—	W O
Ubley	198	55.6	11.6	19.1	10.6	1.0	2.0	—	W O
Compton Martin	446	34.7	17.2	25.3	5.6	1.0	0.5	15.7	W O B T
Chewton	467	33.4	4.3	49.0	8.0	4.4	0.4	0.4	W O
Dinder	181	26.0	1.0	63.0	7.0	1.3	—	1.0	W O
Cheddar	302	59.3	2.9	11.9	15.2	1.0	9.6	—	W Po
Wookey	213	50.3	10.2	18.7	7.0	7.0	4.6	2.4	W O

¹ Findlay, *op. cit.*, 1965, p. 78.

² T. D. Acland, 'On the Farming of Somersetshire', *Jnl Roy. Agric. Soc. Eng.*, xi, 1850, p. 666. Reprinted the following year with William Sturge's essay and entitled *The Farming of Somersetshire*, from which this quotation is taken, p. 73.

³ Public Record Office (P.R.O.), Home Office documents, H.O. 67/2; Billingsley, *Waste Land*, p. 49.

were all the crops grown at the time recorded in the Returns. Nevertheless, provided one does not place too much emphasis on the absolute amounts, but considers more the proportion of any parish under particular crops and their ranking one against another, then the Returns can be fairly safely regarded as a sample of the true conditions.¹

Wheat was important enough to account for more than 50 per cent of the crop land in Blagdon, Ubley, Wookey, and Cheddar and there was not one parish which did not return some wheat. But oats was in an even more commanding position being grown in all parishes and accounting for over 50 per cent of the crop land in Rowbarrow, Shepton Mallet, West and East Harptree, and Dinder, and over 48 per cent in Wells and Chewton. Barley hardly entered into the Returns for the Mendips. The outstanding preference for oats lay in its suitability to the harsh climate and thin soils of the plateau, conditions which also accounted, in part, for the abundance of potatoes which was over 10 per cent of the crop land in five of the twelve parishes. All in all, the evidence of the Returns supports independently the evidence from other sources.

After the period of exploitive grain-farming died down in the 1820's and 1830's, grazing became important again, and was accompanied by a great expansion of potato-growing, the potatoes being cropped alternately with oats. Over 2,000 acres in the vicinity of Priddy alone were either planted by local farmers or the land was let out to the 'potato-jobbers', as they were called, who came up to the plateau for a short season. Eventually, falling prices and the potato plague put an end to this system.² One can say that by the middle of the nineteenth century the Mendips were used in the summer mostly for the grazing of cattle from the Levels and for the grazing of sheep throughout the year, and that there were also substantial patches of land being cultivated intelligently by the farmers that had come up on to the plateau to establish their farmsteads. But much still needed to be done and it was Acland's view in 1851 that "assuredly, a large part of the Hill must be reclaimed again before it can be properly farmed."³

HEDGES AND FENCES

Enclosure implied hedging and fencing and between 1771 and 1813 some 24,000 acres of land were enclosed by Parliamentary Act together with about 3,500 acres of land without an Act in the central area of the plateau. At the present time 100 acres of enclosed land results in a varying amount of fencing, depending upon the size of the fields, and upon the length of roads, which require double fencing. A series of random sample counts in 100 acre squares on

¹ Based on P.R.O., H.O. 62/2. For a discussion of the validity of the Returns and the working out of the crop combinations, M. Williams, 'The 1801 Crop Returns for Somerset', *Proc. Som. Arch. & Nat. Hist. Soc.*, 113, 1969, pp. 69-85.

² Acland and Sturge, *The Farming of Somersetshire*, pp. 73, 145.

Ibid., p. 76.

the plateau gives results varying from 5 miles of fencing per 100 acres to 7.8 miles, but many fall around 6 miles. By extending this average figure over the 27,500 acres enclosed, then 1,650 miles of fencing and hedging were needed to produce the present pattern, a good measure of the effort involved in remoulding the landscape.

Because of the abundance of carboniferous limestone which either outcropped or was lying near the surface of the shallower soils, dry walls were most common, although they gave "a farm a very cold and naked appearance," and gave very little shelter to stock. Yet the enclosers often preferred the hawthorn quickset, although other kinds of hedge were occasionally planted, such as blackthorn, holly, and elder. The quickset grew rapidly and soon became close, thick, and impenetrable, such as those hedges near Shepton Mallet which by 1806 were 8 to 10 feet high, and so thick that it was said "that a bird can scarcely creep between them."¹

Billingsley, who farmed at Ashwick Court, near Oakhill, was the principal advocate of the quickset, and as he sat on at least seven of the Mendip enclosure commissions (no. 65, East Harptree; no. 33, Rodney Stocke; no. 18, West Harptree; no. 81, Wells; no. 73, Horrington; no. 72, Croscombe and Dinder; and no. 38, Cheddar) and had reserved substantial allotments in these and other enclosures, he had plenty of opportunity to put his preferences into practice. Billingsley was said to have enclosed between 3,000 and 4,000 acres of his own land, creating nearly 100 miles of hedge and ditch fencing, and to have planted 1,500,000 thorn plants. At his own recommended planting of one every 3 inches this gives approximately 95 miles of quickset fencing, which tallies well with the previous estimate of 100 miles.²

But the rigours of the exposed situation of the Mendips demanded that some sort of 'dead' fence, usually a dry stone wall, be erected as a temporary shelter, it being recommended that the wall be demolished later, the stones to be used for either lime-burning, road-building, or drain-making, or, if they were of good quality, for farm buildings. The advantage of the dry wall as a rapidly erected shelter was enhanced by the cheapness of its construction, especially where the stones were abundant and had to be cleared from the fields anyway. A substantial dry wall, 2 feet wide at the bottom and 5 feet high cost 10s. or less per rope (20 feet) in 1806 which compared with 11s. for hedges with banks; 13s. 6d. for quickset hedge with a low stone wall; 15s. for a list wall (a

¹ Billingsley, *Waste Lands*, p. 10.

² Editorial comment appended to an article by J. Billingsley, 'Remarks on the Utility of the Bath and West Society with an Account of the Progress of Improvement in the County of Somerset', *Letters to the Bath and West of England Agricultural Society*, x, 1805, p. 246. This figure for the length of fencing is about one-half of that calculated for the present day (see above), but this is reasonable as the initial enclosure was usually concerned with the fencing-in of large blocks of land, and the internal subdivisions were erected later.

combination of dry-walling and turf), and 17s. 6d. for a mortared stone wall.¹

Exposure to the weather was one problem in the establishment and growth of the live hedges, and stock were another. Some protection from the ravages of stock was afforded by the sheltering stone wall on one side, and after a ditch was dug on the other side. But these measures could have provided only a partial solution to the problem for the need was to keep livestock out of the field for as long as possible after the hedges had been planted. This was stipulated in some enclosure awards, although how well this regulation was observed, is not known.

All in all, the dry limestone walls predominated and gave to the Mendips one of the distinctive elements of its landscape. Writing in 1851 Sturge said, "the fences are generally stone walls, with a few white thorn hedges," a description that one would not need to alter at present. Yet, he added that although the low stone walls were inexpensive because of the abundance of stone, they were ill-adapted to "this bleak district." The high Devonshire and west Somerset banks with beech on top would have served the stock better.²

Closely associated with fences and hedges was the planting of trees. Billingsley summed up the advantages well. "Judicious and well-disposed belts and clumps of trees increase the beauty as well as the value of new inclosures. There are very few descriptions of soil or climate where trees of some kinds will not grow in clumps. They afford shelter and defence to the fields, are pleasant to the eye and ultimately profitable."³ He recommended planting fir, larch, beech, ash, sycamore, and birch at one perch intervals along the hedges, but his suggestions were rarely taken up in practice as relatively few hedges were established and trees were more usually planted in clumps or belts. FIGURE IV shows the outcome of planting in the three typical parishes of Ubley, Compton Martin, and East Harptree on the northern portion of the Mendip Hills. This pattern of woodland plantation, mainly for windbreaks rather than for timber, was the result of many haphazard individual landlords' and tenants' decisions; there was little method or plan in it compared with the almost circular plantation that enclosed about 400 acres on Green Ore Farm in Chewton Mendip, which excited much comment and attention from the local agricultural writers of the nineteenth century.⁴

¹ Billingsley, *Waste Land*, pp. 17-18. Writing fifty years later, Acland gave an even lower price of 1s. 8d. per rope for low stone walls for dividing up the major allotments, which, if correct, enhanced even more the competitive advantage of dry walling against other types of fencing.—Acland and Sturge, *The Farming of Somersetshire*, p. 75.

² Acland and Sturge, *The Farming of Somersetshire*, 1851, pp. 146, 148.

³ Billingsley, *Waste Land*, p. 23.

⁴ Acland and Sturge, *The Farming of Somersetshire*, pp. 74, 147; J. Darby, 'The Farming of Somerset', *Jnl Bath and West Eng. Soc.*, v, 1873, p. 131 *et seq.* These plantations may owe much to Billingsley for Acland (p. 76) says that Billingsley erected many of the buildings on the farm.

THE NEW FIELDS

An inspection of any of the enclosure maps of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries reveals allotments ranging in size from less than 1 acre to over 250 acres. The Commissioners were concerned with the fencing of the major boundaries, and carefully stipulated on map and in schedule the owner's responsibilities for erecting fences, but, the internal subdividing fences of the larger areas were left to the discretion of the landlord or tenants. For example, the Ubley and West Harptree enclosures in FIGURE IV show a great deal of internal subdivision compared with the original layout in FIGURE III. Sometimes, however, the internal subdivisions were suggested in the award, as at Compton Martin, although these were never fixed by fences, presumably, because they made fields which were too small. Thus the enclosure awards were responsible for many, though by no means all, of the new fields. By and large, the skeletal framework of the new landscape was laid out in the late eighteenth century.

The new fields were distinguished by two features, first their regular geometrical shape, and secondly their size. The regularity and geometrical division of the plateau was in marked contrast to the older landscape in all surrounding areas, except for the Levels, where draining had left its own peculiar imprint on the land. Straight lines and right-angles tended to dominate the rural scene and contrasted with the irregular pattern that had evolved through centuries of making the landscape elsewhere. The new fields tended to be oblong rather than square, but whether this was sheer chance or deliberate planning by the Commissioners following Billingsley's advice is not known. Billingsley felt that ease of access and the provision of gates was facilitated by oblong fields, and he also averred that the feeding-off of the pasture was accomplished more economically.¹

In order to test this oft-quoted generalization that large fields resulted from parliamentary enclosures, the modern field sizes have been plotted in FIGURE V for the main mass of the plateau and for an area of equivalent size surrounding it. Certain areas have been excluded from the map because of urban development, quarrying, or because of a pattern of minute gardens and fields too small to show. Fields have been grouped into three categories; those less than 10 acres, those between 10 and 20 acres, and those of 20 acres or more, any group of two or more contiguous fields in any one category being plotted. The results are also presented in tabular form on p. 78, but in seven categories, the first six of which are based on 5-acre intervals.

The smallest fields are in the oldest settled areas; on the fringes of the plateau and in other areas of early settlement in the vicinity of Priddy in par-

¹ Billingsley, *Waste Land*, p. 27.

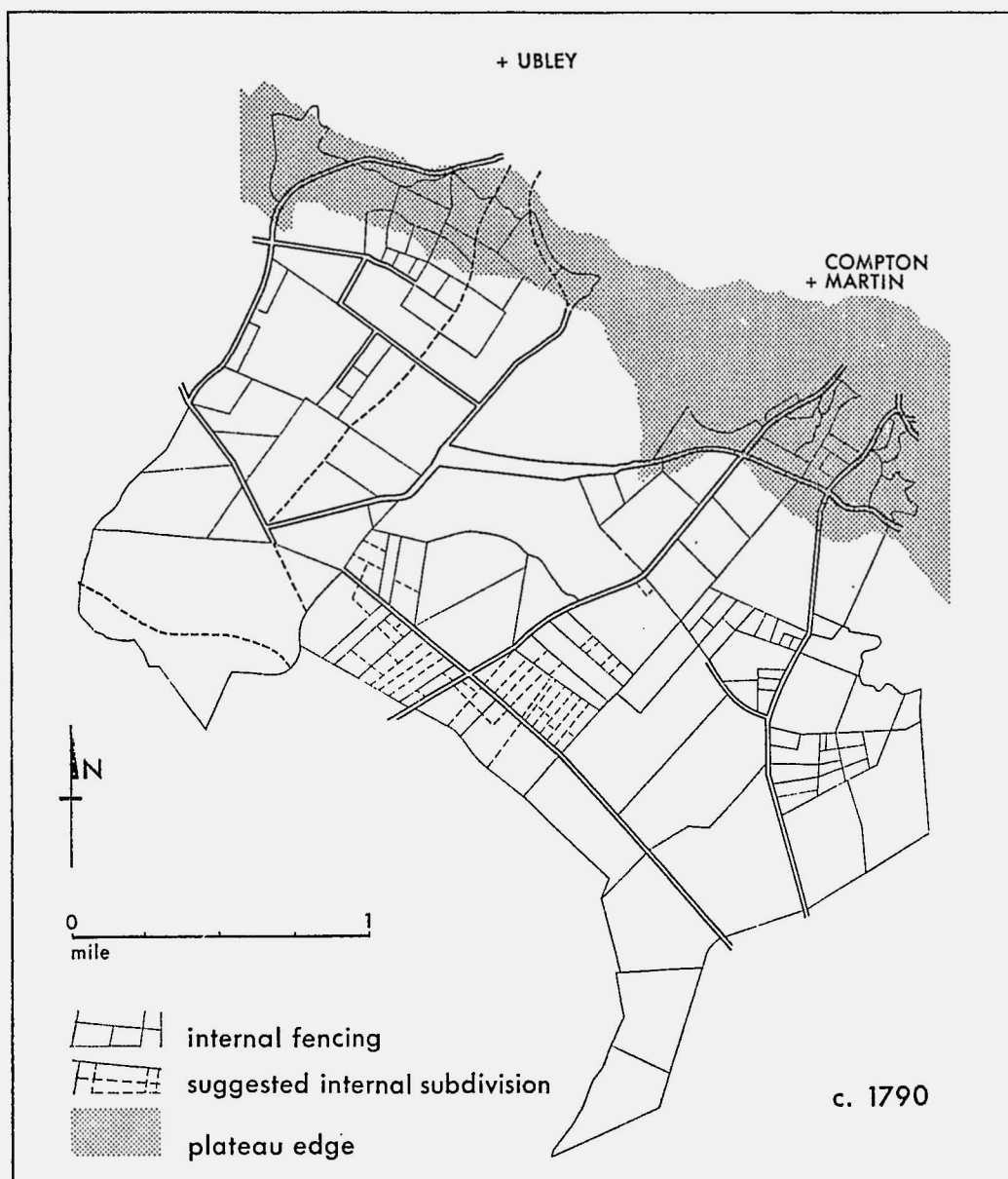


FIG. III

The Mendip enclosures of the parishes of Ubley, East Harptree, and Compton Martin, c. 1790. (Based on enclosure awards and maps.) The shaded plateau edge lies between the 800- and 400-foot contours

ticular, around Charterhouse, and surrounding the pre-enclosure farmsteads of the two Haydons, north-east of Wells, and Middle Ellick Farm in Blagdon. Some of the small fields are more modern, however, and in the vicinity of most new farms there were three or four small enclosures that show up as pockets of

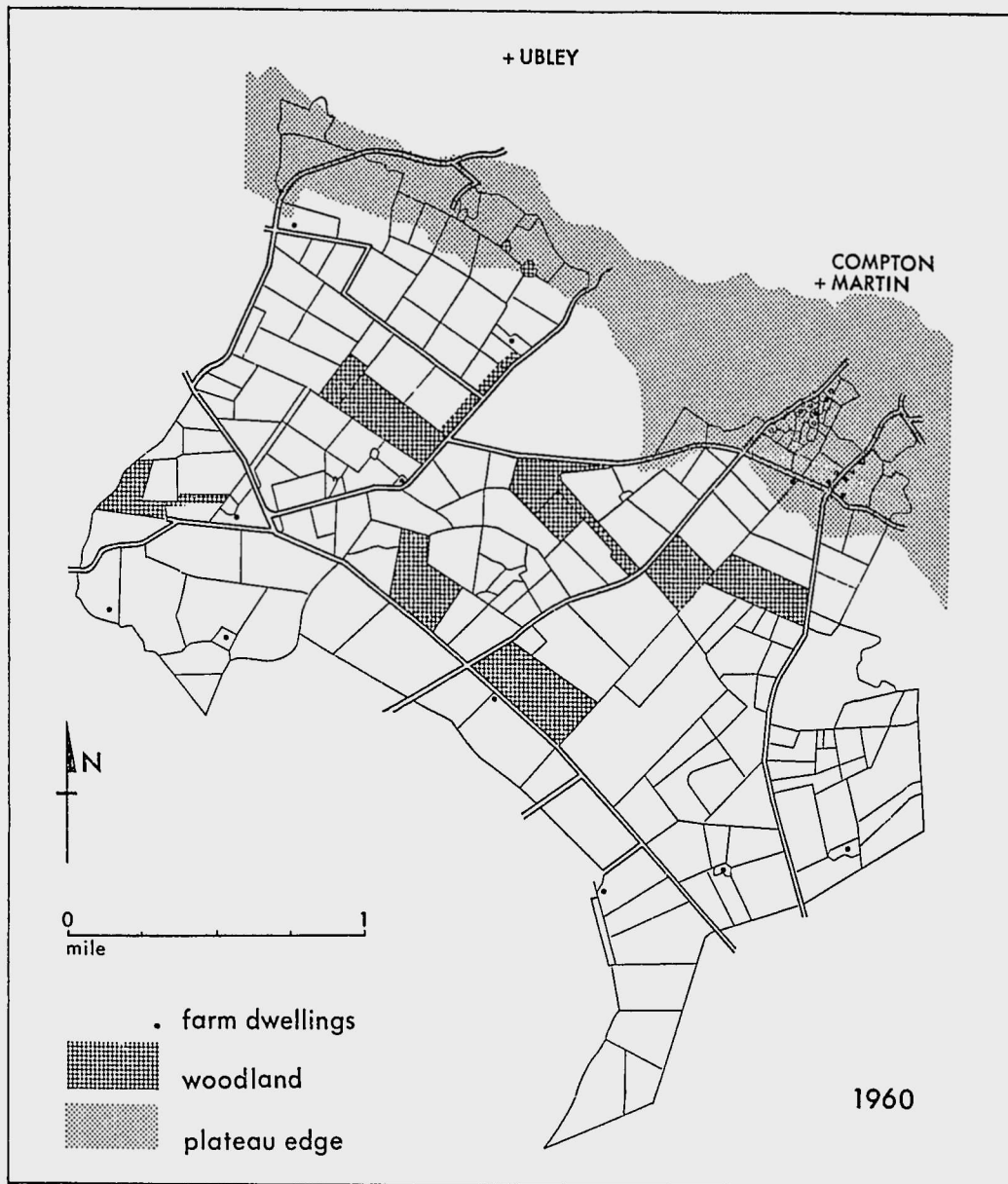


FIG. IV

The Mendip enclosures of the parishes of Ubley, East Harptree, and Compton Martin, 1960.
(Based on Ordnance Survey 1:25,000 maps)

small fields, particularly in the northern arc of enclosed land and in the eastern extremity of the plateau beyond Wells, where the farms and small fields are so numerous that the pockets coalesce to give large continuous areas of small fields. But nearly half the fields of 10 acres and more were very markedly local-

ized in the areas of new enclosure and the 20-acre field was almost wholly restricted to the plateau. The obvious relationship between most fields over 10 acres and the distribution of the soils of the Nordach and Priddy Series can be seen by comparing FIGURE V with FIGURE II. One very interesting exception to the generalization that enclosure meant larger fields was the provision of 'potato gardens', presumably for displaced commoners, at The Wrangle in Compton Martin (FIGURE IV). The areas set aside in the award were later subdivided into half-acre blocks on which homes were then erected.¹

TABLE II

THE NUMBER AND PERCENTAGE OF FIELDS OF VARIOUS SIZE WITHIN AND OUTSIDE
THE AREAS OF PARLIAMENTARY ENCLOSURE IN THE MENDIP HILLS

<i>Acres</i>	<i>Inside the enclosed land</i>		<i>Outside the enclosed land</i>	
	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
0-4	388	24.4	1,309	47.0
5-9	475	29.9	1,039	37.0
10-14	302	19.0	292	10.4
15-19	161	10.1	78	2.8
20-24	83	5.2	29	1.0
25-29	51	3.2	13	0.7
30 or more	127	8.1	22	0.9
<i>Total</i>	1,587	99.9	2,782	99.8

It should not be forgotten that when the enclosure commissioners drew up their awards, they also made some drastic alterations to the pattern of roads. The tangle of poorly defined tracks which crossed the plateau is shown on Day and Master's map, *The County of Somerset* (1782). This pattern of sinuous courses was replaced by one of straight lines, roads were laid out generously to a width of 40 feet, perhaps 12 to 16 feet of which were surfaced, and the remainder left as green verges which were useful for driving stock and were sometimes let out to be grazed by the animals of former commoners.

THE NEW FARMSTEADS

A great many new farmsteads were created in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries on the newly enclosed land. The location of most of them is shown in FIGURE VI, but as few of them bear a date, their construction must

¹ Social considerations such as these were not very common because there were many alternative forms of employment for the former commoners. These arrangements nowhere approach the complexity of those for displaced commoners which were carried out in Denmark. See H. Thorpe, 'The influence of enclosure on the form and pattern of rural settlement in Denmark', *Trans. Inst. Brit. Geog.*, 17, 1951, pp. 113-29.

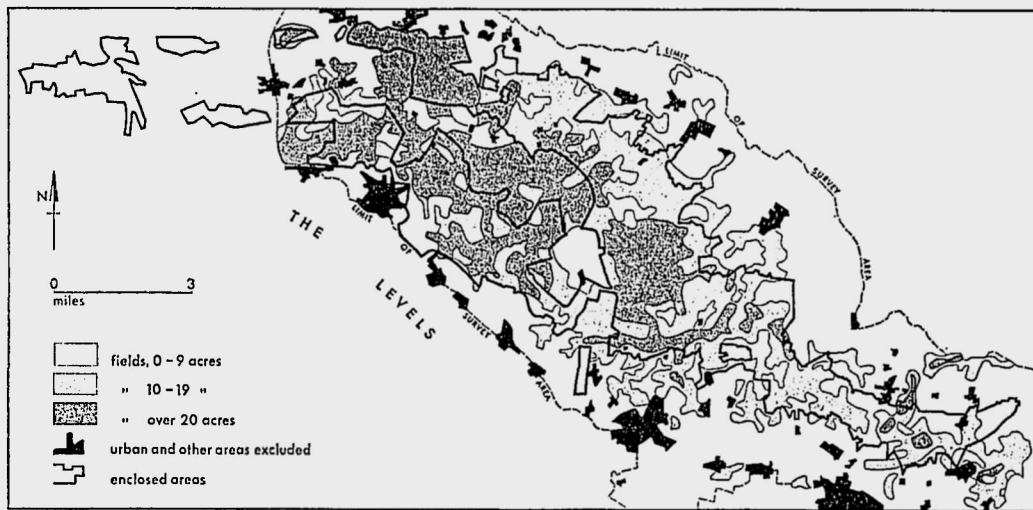


FIG. V

The sizes of fields in the Mendip Hills and surrounding areas



FIG. VI

New farmsteads in the Mendip enclosures after 1782

be traced from map evidence. Certainly those farmsteads located within the enclosed areas were new; they did not appear on the enclosure awards, but they do on the map of Greenwood in 1822, and also on various editions of the Ordnance Survey maps throughout the nineteenth century. Farm names also help in dating the farms. Those with possessives like Knappe's, Will's, Batt's, and

Symmer's sometimes refer to the names of the new owners, and farm names like Upper Canada, Victoria, and Wellington, and Mendip and Warren Farm are either indicative of events of the age or of conditions on the plateau where the new farms were being established.

Most of the new farms, however, did not appear until after the 1820's. Initially, many of the allotments on the plateau were assigned to homesteads in the villages of the surrounding vales and to individual farms on the plateau slopes, and these farmers exploited the new enclosures "and grew oats without manure as long as the land would bear it."¹ When the detrimental results of this method of utilization became apparent, more enlightened landlords built new farms on the plateau, and every opportunity was taken to site them carefully and build them on convenient and spacious lines.

Many farmsteads were situated fairly centrally to their land and sited either in hollows or in the lee of slight eminences on the plateau, the farmhouse usually having an east or south-east aspect. Most were constructed of local grey stone with a slate or tile roof and, in plan, were adapted to the needs of wheat and sheep-farming. The dwelling house was flanked on one side by a large barn and stalling for cattle, and on the other by a wagon house, often with a granary overhead. There was sometimes a pig-sty and a poultry house. In 1802 it was calculated that a house and buildings for a 400-500-acre farm could be built for £1,200, and we are fortunate in having the detailed costs of improvements (though not of land and interest charges) of Wigmore Farm in Chewton Mendip parish.² The farm was 440 acres and the total costs were as shown in TABLE III.

There was one other item of expenditure that was not accounted for in this list of costs, and that was water supply. The new farms on the plateau lay at a great distance from the old sources of water and, to meet the need for new supplies, springs were sometimes utilized, wells sunk in favourable localities, or more usually, ponds dug; one was set near the house and others in the fields, perhaps one at the intersection of four fields.

CONCLUSION

The story of the enclosure of the Mendip Hills brings to light much evidence about the methods of reclamation and improvement of the waste, and of the effects that these methods and processes had upon the land and livelihood of the rural areas when a new plan of organization was laid on the land, in the form of roads, fields, fences, and farms. From this evidence one can offer a new range of details that may serve to refine and expand existing knowledge about the reclamation of waste land, knowledge which has so far been based on only a limited view of the possible examples.

¹ Acland and Sturge, *The Farming of Somersetshire*, p. 73.

² Billingsley, *Waste Land*, p. 45.

TABLE III

COSTS OF ESTABLISHING WIGMORE FARM, CHEWTON MENDIP

	£ s. d.	Per cent of total cost
<i>Reclamation costs</i>		
Cutting furze, levelling, hauling off surface stones, draining	183 19 2	
Ploughing, dragging, and manuring 380 acres at 160 bushels of lime per acre	2,090 0 0	
	£2,273 19 2	56.8
<i>Establishment costs</i>		
Stone and quickset fences	287 19 0	
Roads	100 16 4	
Limekilns	40 0 0	
Future fencing expenses	256 10 8	
	£685 6 0	17.1
<i>Dwellings and farm buildings</i>		
Cottage	44 14 10	
Main building (house, stable, barn, stalling)	846 0 0	
Waggon house and pig-sty	150 0 0	
	£1,040 14 10	26.0
<i>Total</i>	£4,000 0 0	99.9