

The Culleys, Northumberland Farmers, 1767-1813

By D. J. ROWE

MATTHEW and George Culley were born, respectively, in 1730 and 1734, the sons of Matthew Culley. There were also two other brothers, Robert, the eldest, and James, who was probably born between Matthew and George. The brothers were brought up at Denton, near Darlington, in County Durham, where their father had a farm of about two hundred acres. Matthew Culley, senior, was particularly interested in new and improved methods of agriculture and in the early 1760's sent George and Matthew, the two of his sons who showed the greatest interest in farming, to Dishley in Leicestershire as pupils of Robert Bakewell, who was already becoming famous for his improvements to the Leicestershire sheep and longhorn cattle. There they picked up the principle of breeding by taking the best animals and continually breeding from them, which they were to follow for the remainder of their lives. They returned to Denton but there was little scope for them to put their ideas into practice. The farm was small, and would in any event become the property of Robert when their father died, and Robert was little interested in farming, being more concerned to have a gay bachelor life. Thus in 1767, Matthew and George moved to north Northumberland, tenanting a farm at Fenton, north of Wooler. At some stage they were joined by James, if indeed he did not go with them initially, since, until his death in 1793, he was in partnership with Matthew and George, working their Northumberland farms.

The great attraction about north Northumberland was that large farms were available; one thousand acres was not uncommon and rents were reasonable. The basic reason for the latter was that the agriculture of the area had been considerably retarded as a result of the Border Wars with the Scots. Large areas of suitable agricultural land had remained uncultivated for long periods until the mid-seventeenth century and farming practice had improved only slowly since that time. The disadvantage was that the agricultural techniques of the area were backward, but this would not worry the Culleys, nor the other advanced Durham farmers who moved to north Northumberland in this period, since they knew the methods they intended to adopt and were not to be discouraged by the poor practice of other farmers.

Of the first years which they spent at Fenton we have no record, but one of their earliest activities, at the time that Arthur Young was involved in his agricultural tours, was travelling in England and Scotland, examining the

agricultural methods of various areas. No doubt as pupils of Bakewell they were already becoming known in farming circles, and they met and stayed with many farmers throughout the country, who might have been less willing hosts had they known what was written by the brothers in their journals of farming practice. Unlike Young's tours the Culley journals were never intended for publication but merely as reports for their own interest. Nevertheless, they show that the brothers had already picked up much of what was to be the advanced farming practice of the late eighteenth century. They were very critical of farming which did not reach their standard, although they were always on the look-out for new ideas and techniques which they could adopt to improve their own practice. Undoubtedly these tours helped to give them that broad knowledge of agricultural technique which placed them among the leading farmers of their period. Among the remaining Culley papers¹ there are accounts of tours made by George Culley to Leicestershire in 1765 and again in 1771, to Scotland in 1771, and through the Midlands into East Anglia in 1784, while there are the journals of Matthew's tours to Scotland in 1770 and 1775 with notes made by George, including comments on farming practice in Scotland in 1794 and in 1798, when, in company with his nephew Matthew, the son of George, he went to Leicestershire. The comments made in the journals of these tours throw a lot of light on the views held by the Culleys on farming and more particularly on the state of farming practice in various parts of the country. Together with these journals go the letters sent by one of the brothers who was touring to the other at home, commenting on agricultural practice seen, and giving advice as to what should be done on their Northumberland farms.

Putting together the experience they had obtained at Dishley and from their tours, the brothers determined to adopt the best farming practice of which they were aware, on arable as well as pasture. Their major introduction to Northumberland was a variation on the famous Norfolk crop rotation. It was found that "Those who have practised the Norfolk system on thin light soils, find their crops grow worse, especially the turnips and clover, and many have been obliged to adopt this system, by which they find their lands renovated; and, instead of having to complain that their soil was 'tired of turnips and clover', they now find that it produces abundant crops, and that every rotation brings it nearer its former fertility."² "This system" was a form of mixed farming or convertible husbandry. It involved a crop rotation lasting over six or seven years, but from about 1800 more usually of five years, of oats, turnips, barley, or wheat, and the remaining years pasture. It was found that a rotation of this

¹ In the Northumberland Country Record Office (N.C.R.O.). These journals are in ZCU 1.

² J. Bailey and G. Culley, eds., *General View of the Agriculture of the County of Northumberland*, 3rd edn, 1805, pp. 70-1.

kind provided the best kind of balanced farming for the soil, and it created the sheep and turnip husbandry for which the Culleys and north Northumberland became famous. It spread also beyond the dry, light lands on which the Culleys farmed to the heavy, wet clays and loams further south in the county and helped to do away with the fallowing which was previously common. The Culleys were strongly opposed to fallows, recommending their replacement by leguminous crops, and in their report on the county Bailey and Culley wrote, "we cannot help being inclined to think, that the quantity of naked fallow might be very much reduced, and in another century will probably be totally abolished, if no fortuitous circumstances arise to check the exertions and spirit for improvement which have been so prevalent of late years, and so generally diffused through this district."¹

In encouraging the adoption of the new rotation in Northumberland the Culleys were instrumental in encouraging more farmers to grow turnips (and also artificial grasses), a crop which had only recently been grown in the county but which was soon of importance as a winter feed for sheep, which fed off the turnips in the fields and in doing so left their droppings and manured the field, a system of management called folding. The particular contributions made by the Culleys to the cultivation of turnips were to drill the seed rather than sow it broadcast and especially to grow turnips on a ridge and furrow system, with a thick layer of manure on the ridge immediately below the turnip seed. Thus, when the seed rooted it got the full benefit of the manure and the Culleys obtained good crops, having experimented with different types of seed, and were soon selling considerable quantities of turnip seed to farmers in the area. Early in the nineteenth century George Culley wrote to some satisfied customers, "I am very happy to hear that our turnip seed has given such general satisfaction in your neighbourhood. Indeed it is a very pleasant circumstance to us that this has been the case wherever it is sown, and our demand increases every season. We grow all the seed we sell and now raise none but the large *globular* white, which we ourselves prefer, and find that it meets with the approbation of all our customers. We have tried *green* and *red* both formerly, but left them off as we found the white not only feeds better, but withstands the winter best, and grows to a very sufficient size . . . it will not be more than 1s. p. pound or £5 12s. the cwt. . . I own it higher than the best London prices. But our demand is such that we can always sell higher than others and indeed price is of no consequence in turnip seed, where you can be assured of a good commodity."² It was typical of the business efficiency of the Culleys that they missed nothing which could be raised and sold at a profit. Around the turn of the century they were receiving around £500 annually from the sale of about 10,000 pounds of turnip seed.

¹ Bailey and Culley, *op. cit.*, pp. 68-9.

² N.C.R.O., ZCU 31, 24 Feb. 1803.

The Culleys did much to drain the marshy lands along the banks of the rivers on their land and to embank the rivers to prevent flooding. Having done this they became interested in the creation of water meadows in order to obtain early grass for sheep and cattle feed in the months March–May when winter feedstuffs were running short. George Culley applied to Robert Bakewell for any suggestion in this field and was recommended to apply to George Boswell of Piddletown in Dorset, for a man to do watering.¹ It was eventually decided that Culley should send a man to Dorset to learn the practice of watering meadows during the winter season, October–April 1787–8.² The practice became common and the Culleys recommended water meadows to many of their farming acquaintance; in 1799 we find Matthew Culley writing to John Welch, who was the Culleys' steward and land agent at Denton, where land had come into the hands of Matthew on the death of Robert in 1783, "We are watering our meadows, now in harvest, and our cattle and sheep are all taken off them. . . The water at Denton should be made use of whenever opportunity offers, and especially in floods. Turn your attention that way . . . to Draining and Irrigation, as the advantages resulting therefrom are obvious."³ This arrangement with Boswell provided Culley with another correspondent to add to the many improvement-conscious farmers throughout the country with whom he maintained contact. Boswell also bought corn seed from Culley, a branch of agriculture in which the Culleys are not usually considered to have been active. In January 1789 Boswell asked George Culley to send him bags of the various types of oats which the Culleys usually sowed. In April he wrote again, "Each of the kinds are vastly superior to any we grow here but the Poland are infinitely beyond any ever seen in this country. . . I bought six quarters of Poland oats imported at Weymouth from the Continent, though thought here very good yet when compared with yours, they fell very short indeed." The story was completed in October when Boswell wrote once more, full of praise for the produce of the seed he had had from Culley⁴ and thus giving some evidence that by this period north Northumberland deserves to be considered as advanced in some aspects of corn-growing, in addition to stock-rearing, as the rest of the country.

It is, however, in stock-rearing that the Culleys made their biggest mark in Northumberland farming. Although they took with them from Denton to Fenton in 1767 their herd of shorthorns, which was much admired by Robert Colling, and which was one factor in encouraging his work on the breed, the Culleys had no marked success as cattle breeders in Northumberland. Their correspondence shows that they bred and sold cattle, some fine horses, and

¹ University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne Library, Bakewell MSS, 8 Feb. 1787.

² N.C.R.O., ZCU 12, 25 March 1787.

³ *Ibid.*, ZCU 44, 17 Sept. 1799.

⁴ *Ibid.*, ZCU 14, 24 Jan., 6 April, and 25 Oct. 1789.

showed some slight interest in pigs, but their success and fame came in the field of sheep-breeding. Impressed with the long-woolled Dishley sheep, becoming known as the New Leicesters, which they had seen as pupils of Bakewell, the Culleys introduced them to north Northumberland. They were not entirely suitable for the upland pastures on the slopes of the Cheviots, which formed part of many of the farms in the area, since they were considerably less hardy than the Cheviot and Heath breeds of sheep, which were the standard sheep in the area. The Culleys, therefore, crossed their Dishley tups (rams) with ewes of the Teeswater breed which were common in the Darlington area in which they were brought up, and thus produced the Culley or Border Leicester, a fairly hardy, quick-growing sheep which fed and fattened readily and spread widely throughout the county. William Marshall wrote of Culley, "His breed of sheep are known, even to the 'farthest Thule' by the popular name of the 'Culley breed'."¹ Later the Border Leicesters were crossed with Cheviots to produce half-bred ewes, still a common practice in the area.

A recent study of the development of livestock has suggested that the Culleys had only one flock of long-woolled Dishleys on the border farms of Northumberland, among several from which the Border Leicester evolved in the early nineteenth century, and that they do not have a unique claim to having fathered that breed.² There is certainly no doubt that there were other herds of Dishleys in north Northumberland in the late eighteenth century but there is no evidence to suggest that any of them were established before 1767 when the Culleys arrived at Fenton. Similarly it would seem that the Culleys kept a more pure herd of Dishleys than their neighbours, and were the first to introduce the Teeswater cross. Contemporaries, as we have seen in the case of William Marshall, certainly considered the Culleys (George particularly) to be the leading authority on sheep, next to Bakewell. To some extent this may have resulted from the fact that George Culley was a better publicist than many of his rivals. In 1786 he published his *Observations on Livestock; containing Hints for choosing and improving the Best Breeds of the most Useful Kinds of Domestic Animals*, which went through four editions in the next twenty years and, popularly known as "*Culley on Livestock*," was the authority on the subject.

In his correspondence and comments made when touring the country George Culley made clear the failings of many sheep-breeders and the actions which he and his colleagues were taking to overcome them.

In his book Culley wrote, "A person who has travelled through the different breeding counties, cannot but remark the great diversity of opinion in the

¹ W. Marshall, *The Review and Abstract of the County Reports to the Board of Agriculture*, 1808-18, reprinted 1969, vol. I, Northern Department, p. 11.

² R. Trow-Smith, *A History of British Livestock Husbandry, 1700-1900*, 1959, p. 273.

characteristic distinctions of excellence in domestic animals, particularly sheep. A Norfolk sheep-breeder says, sheep should be *black-faced* and *black-legged*; that their *horns* should come out *forward*, and turn in such a manner as you can see the *ears through*, or *behind*, the *circle of the horns*. A Wiltshire sheep-breeder, on the contrary, says, that sheep should have *white faces* and *white legs*; and that their *horns* should come out *backwards*, in such a manner, that the *ears* may be seen before the *horns*. . . Could any of these people be prevailed upon to make an experiment, they would most probably find, that excellence does not depend on the *situation* or *size* of *horns*, or on the colour of *faces* and *legs*, but on other *more essential properties*."¹ His views on the matter were formed during various tours and especially that of 1784 when he wrote to Matthew telling him of the sheep he saw. At Arthur Young's in Suffolk he wrote "his sheep are scabbed."² Of the sheep in the Nottingham area, "It's amazing how fashions change, not many yrs ago, nothing wo'd do but short carcass [*sic*] & short legs, now they must be long carcassed & stand high or they will not do at all, thin necked, streight [*sic*] topped, flat topped, and wide, in short light in the useless part, & thick in the usefull part, I am talking of sheep Mr Matt."³ From Sawton in Yorkshire he wrote, "I sent you a letter from Malton yesterday. Afterwards we took a look at the Tups which were come to the fair against Monday. My friend B. Sayles makes only a middling figure. . . A Mr Lees of Lackenley much worse, this young man has been thorough [*sic*] Lincoln & hired a Tup of Mr Chaplin, a rare skinned one he says, such a one as will please the Wolds people. Surpassing strange, these people do not see thorough this delusion, no wonder my bro'r James lost his usefull sheep by breeding to the tastes of these mistaken folks, I am very sure that you cannot conceive how bad these sheep are. I would not have missed coming this road upon any acc't, when they will awaken from this delirium I know not. I asked young Lee if the Tup he had hired of Mr Chaplin was fat, he candidly confessed that he was not, 'but a deal of Bone and Skin' thats the thing Mr Matt. The fattest sheep we saw were at Mr Codds of Bakewells kind, but said they were little wadling *Toads*."⁴

Not all sheep breeders were so backward. From Ranley in Lincolnshire George wrote that local breeders had given up the battle "to better judgment, this truly great and indefatigible man Mr B[akewell] convinces in gen'l

¹ G. Culley, *Observations on Livestock*, 4th edn, 1807, v-vi.

² N.C.R.O., ZCU 1, 23 Dec. 1784.

³ *Ibid.*, ZCU 9, 18 Nov. 1784. Even at the time George was the better known agriculturist of the two, although Matthew was competent and George had a high opinion of him. On one occasion when writing to John Welch, George said, "I am giving you long lectures without thinking that my brother will be with you in a little time, who, when his head is unclouded, 'can see as far into a milstone [*sic*] as him that picks it'. In fact, though he is not a good salesman, there are few better advisers."—*Ibid.*, ZCU 44, 29 Jan. 1801.

⁴ *Ibid.*, ZCU 9, 10 Oct. 1784.

wherever he goes."¹ Many breeders while admitting they were wrong were not yet prepared to pay the prices of good stock. From Sawton he wrote, "I could have let a few Tups tollerably [*sic*] well I think, tho' they are not fond of giving above 5 guineas. Mr Sayle let some at no more than 3 g. . . it is amazing to me that they do not try to get better, because they confess they are wrong, & many of the Wolds people are or seem to be convinced of their mistake, & they must necessarily change the sort. I am of opinion they are ashamed to come to us . . . Mr Clever . . . candidly owns . . . that ours were best in England except Mr Bakewells and he tho't ours as good."²

The Culleys were very proud of this growing reputation that their flocks were second only to Bakewell's. In 1789 George wrote to John Bailey, agent to Lord Tankerville at Chillingham Castle in Northumberland, "I have the satisfaction to say that we have not used a Tup for more than these twenty years and of any other Person than Mr Bakewell, and we have the *Honor* [*sic*] to stand second in his alphabetical list of Breeders, that have stuck longest to the Dishley Blood."³ A few months later he wrote to Bakewell telling of a Mr Donkin who had said that the Culleys' sheep were only a mixed breed and that his own were the only pure Leicesters. The publishers of the work in which this statement appeared were prepared to make an apology if Culley could show the superiority of his sheep. He went on, "Therefore, sir, if you will be so kind as say how long the Culleys have been your customers, and the prices from lowest to highest, we shall be able, I hope, to vindicate our Character in the face of the Public against this *Daring Champion* for we are all willing to claim kindred to you and as near as we can, we also flatter ourselves would [*sic*] being pretty deep in your Blood. However your certificate can alone decide this matter."⁴

Throughout this period, until his death in 1795, the Culleys remained in close contact with Bakewell, visiting him occasionally and corresponding regularly, always prepared to pick up any new information. While on tour in 1784 George wrote to Matthew from Dishley, ". . . when I reflect that we were glad to spend a few days or wks with this extraordinary man [Bakewell], when we co'd scarce afford it, makes me scruple less to spend a little time and not a little money with this genius, now we can the better afford it. Besides he is so much the more communicative now than in Ashworth's administration, indeed there is nothing now scarce that he will not give a thoughtful answer to."⁵ There can be little doubt that Culley was a very uncritical admirer of Bakewell, as Trow-Smith has suggested,⁶ taking little notice of the earlier breeders on whose

¹ N.C.R.O., ZCU 9, 4 Dec. 1784.

² *Ibid.*, 10 Oct. 1784.

³ *Ibid.*, ZCU 44, 27 April 1789. It would seem that Culley meant chronological when he used alphabetical, since the first on the list was Nathaniel Stubbins, from whom Culley sometimes had tups.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 2 July 1789.

⁵ *Ibid.*, ZCU 9, 26 Nov. 1784.

⁶ Trow-Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 63.

work Bakewell built. But Culley was no slavish follower of Dishley ideas. Trow-Smith, himself, has written, "Standing beside these sheep [the New Leicesters] and using them as the tools to fashion even better stock than the Dishley barrel-on-four-short-legs there are such men as Culley and Robson."¹ Culley was also a businessman foremost and an admirer of Bakewell second, and this led to a number of sharp exchanges in their correspondence, since Culley was not prepared to pay high prices for sheep which he did not think came up to standard. During the summer of 1787, Bakewell had let a tup jointly to Culley and Benjamin Sayle, neither of whom was satisfied with him. Bakewell sent a second, making Culley an allowance for the first.² There was a further disagreement in the autumn of 1791 over the price to be paid for a tup called *Star* which Culley had had from Bakewell. Culley wrote, "I cannot say I am at all satisfied with the price you charged for *Star* as I said before, '*as I am in your power*, I shall pay for this time whatever you charge' . . . last year you solicited me much to have a sheep, my answer was, 'we had been so little benefitted by what tups we lately had from Dishley, especially as the best could not be come at, that I thought it imprudent to throw away money'. Upon your further urging me *that it would look well as we were old acquaintance* etc. etc. or arguments to that effect, I said if you would send me a sheep that did us good, I would willingly give an hundred, but would not go farther."³

With breeders other than Bakewell, George Culley was less inclined to patience. In the summer of 1793 he had four tups from Nathaniel Stubbins, the breeder who had had Dishley stock the longest. They were to cost £210 for the best one and £70 each for the others. Despite a plaintive note from Stubbins that he knew one of the last three was not as good as the others and a hope that Culley would not deduct the full amount, the latter sent a cheque for £350 with a note that he had deducted £70 "because the 4th was a nonentity he did no business." Stubbins in his next letter noted, "I have received . . . £350 . . . as I mentioned in my last I was in hopes you would have made it guineas." but he got no change out of Culley.⁴

It is possible that Culley's rather peremptory attitude was due to a disagreement between the Northumberland and Leicester tup breeders' associations, Stubbins being secretary of the latter. In November 1788 a number of Leicestershire sheep-breeders, possibly at the instance of Bakewell, met and formed a tup-breeders' society. Robert Honeybourn, Bakewell's nephew, was appointed treasurer and a subscription of ten guineas was charged.⁵ The aim of the association was to promote the breeding of rams of the Dishley type and to restrict the methods by which they were hired. Early in 1790 Bakewell

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

² Bakewell MSS., *op. cit.*, 31 Aug. and 22 Sept. 1787.

³ N.C.R.O., ZCU 31, 1 Nov. 1791. See also Bakewell MSS.

⁴ *Ibid.*, ZCU 18, 22 Aug., 31 Aug., and 30 Oct. 1793.

⁵ Bakewell MSS., *op. cit.*, 22 Nov. 1788. See also 18 Nov. 1789 and 13 Feb. 1790.

suggested to George Culley that he should form a similar association in Northumberland, since that county was one of the major breeding areas of the Dishley sheep. Notice was taken of this and the Milfield Society (so called because of the name given to the north Northumberland plain, on which the Culleys and their associates farmed) was established in the early summer of 1792, with Lord Hume as president. It adopted similar rules to those of the Leicestershire society and was welcomed by that body as a step towards improving the standards of sheep-breeding.

Some agreement had to be reached between the two societies as to their respective spheres of influence, and initially the Leicestershire society offered not to let tups north of York before 8 June. Culley, the promoter of the Milfield Society, had suggested that a line from Hull through York and Leeds to the Irish Sea should limit their respective lettings, except to members of each other's society, since "without Something of this sort, it will be in vain for us to associate."¹ The Leicestershire society finally offered not to let tups to Scotland, Northumberland, Durham, Cumberland, and Westmorland except to members of the Northumberland society, and proposed that the two societies should be on an equal footing in Lancashire and Yorkshire, providing that the Milfield Society agreed to the Leicester restriction not to let tups to farmers who dealt with the marketing trade. This was accepted but the latter constraint, aimed at restricting the use of Dishley tups for building up pedigree herds and, of course, maintaining the supremacy of the existing breeders, was to cause considerable trouble. Many sheep farmers were still opposed to the Dishley sheep. William Mure wrote to inform George Culley that "the inveterate enemies to *Cullies sheep* turned in a blackguard Galloway ram amongst the flock at a distant farm on hand, out of the whole flock only 5 could be found that had not got the ram. . ."² He had been expecting a ram hired from Culley to put to his sheep. But even where opposition to the new breed was less strong than this, there was resentment against the restriction on letting tups at market. As evidence of this, Culley had invited B. Colling to Barmpton to join the Milfield Society. He replied that, "It is so very little that is done in this quarter that I think it rather bordering upon vanity for a man to call himself a tup man, however if I was a few miles nearer you I should not have the least objection to join your society."³ Yet a couple of months later Colling made it clear that his real reason for not joining was that the rules against letting to market in Yorkshire would have been too inconvenient for him.⁴ Culley also met much opposition of this type among Northumberland farmers and the Milfield Society approached the Leicester group with a view to waiving the restriction. This did not lead to any relaxation in the rules, despite Culley's argument that

¹ Bakewell MSS., *op. cit.*, 13 April 1792.

² N.C.R.O., ZCU 18, 22 Dec. 1793.

³ *Ibid.*, ZCU 17, 24 May 1792.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 5 July 1792.

if the two societies ignored this market other breeders would step in. Relations between the two societies deteriorated and in June 1793, Honeybourn, on behalf of the Leicester society, wrote to Culley accusing him of letting a tup to a market dealer. Culley replied that he had obtained an agreement from the breeder, of Malton in Yorkshire, that none of the produce of the tup would be let at market but that he could not prevent the breeder from selling his old tups at market. The rift was not healed and in December Culley wrote to inform the Leicestershire men that the Milfield Society had been dissolved since the attitude of the Leicester society destroyed the reason for the association.¹ He claimed that the Leicester men had let tups into Yorkshire without informing him and that Bakewell had sold forty ewes to a Northumberland farmer, among other complaints. These were refuted by Stubbins but relations remained strained, and with the death of Bakewell in 1795, Culley largely withdrew from contact with the Leicestershire breeders. This he could afford to do since he no longer needed sheep from them to improve his herd and his reputation had been made.

The basis on which this reputation had been built was the excellent herds of sheep which the Culleys possessed. Gradually farmers in the neighbourhood and from farther afield came to the Culleys to improve their flocks. When at Northallerton, on tour in 1784, George wrote to Matthew, "Mr Cleaver has insisted upon having 10 ewes tupped of J. Taylor by big tup. I am to dine with him tomorrow. I saw him and he is highly pleased with the tup, and like a man acknowledges ours are the best sheep in England, save Dishley."² In 1785 Culley offered Lord Darlington two tups. Darlington had previously had tups from the Culleys but had had some disappointment and on this occasion wrote, "you wished to send me a tup or two . . . if they did not please, you desired nothing for them. I wish you to let me know, if they do please, the price I am to give, before you send them."³ Culley replied that the price would be 40 guineas and Darlington accepted and afterwards had several further dealings with the Culleys. Three years later, Colonel David Hume of Caldra wrote that he wished to improve his herd and wanted to hire a tup.⁴ Thereafter the Culley papers show that they were doing an increasing trade in tups over long distances. In 1790, Culley was doing business with a Norfolk man he had met. "When I had the pleasure of seeing you . . . you expressed a wish to buy a quantity of ewes, of the Dishley blood, and I am vain enough to think that no breeder is more in that blood than we are, for we have had tups from Mr Bakewell for near thirty years. And as proof that they are tolerably good, we have for some years let tups, from 5 to 20 guineas each, & lately up to 50 & 60 & upwards, this very year we have let some to go 150 miles at the latter prices.

¹ *Ibid.*, ZCU 4, 14 June and 11 Dec 1793.

² *Ibid.*, ZCU 1, 6 Oct. 1784.

³ *Ibid.*, ZCU 10, 25 July 1785.

⁴ *Ibid.*, ZCU 13, 1, 6, and 28 Sept. 1788.

And this is the more extraordinary, when it's understood that before we came into this frozen region there never had been a tup sold for above three guineas."¹ It was not long before the distance of the Culley dealings increased. "Yet I say our sheep are larger in general than Mr B. because they are orriginally [*sic*] descended from the Teeswater Sheep, which are confessedly the largest sheep in this Island, but far from handsome, which first suggested the Idea to us of crossing from Leicestershire sheep which I am happy in saying has succeeded beyond our most sanguine expectations. For we now let a number of Rams every Season to great advantage. If not so high as our great Master B., higher than any other North of the River Trent and I should be very happy to have some of our tups or Ewes sent into Ireland, provided it could be done to the mutual advantage of you and us."²

Beyond the inevitable suspicion held by vested interests against new ideas, the Culeys had, above all, to overcome the objections of sheep breeders to paying the high prices which breeders of the Dishley sheep charged. Culley's comment, quoted above, that a tup had never been sold for more than 3 guineas before they moved to north Northumberland may well be an exaggeration, but it is a far cry from the 50 guineas a season which Culley was charging for letting his best tups at the end of the 1780's, with a limitation on the number of ewes which might be put to the tup. Even this price was not high when compared with the 100 guineas level which Bakewell had reached and the price rise of the following two decades was to make this look small. Culley's letters again show the financial problems which occurred when dealing with prospective customers. William Key, who had arranged to have a tup from Culley in the summer of 1792 wrote with regard to "the prices which I hope will not be extravagantly high, for we are thought by our neighbours to be mad to give such prices at this time o' the day when we have, or at least should have, so much of the blood already but our intentions is not to change as long as we are well used by you."³ Since Key had obviously been converted to the Dishley breed for some time it can be no surprise that more recent converts were put off by high prices. In the following year, W. Marshall, Lord Breadalbane's agent, wrote to Culley from Taymouth, "I now beg of you to forward to this place at the proper season, one hundred of such ewes as you think will be likely to become profitable to Lord Breadalbane's Estate, and to the Culley breed of sheep, and with them a ram of a middle price; by a person conversant in the care and management of longwooled [*sic*] sheep, and who can remain here until the ewes have dropt their lambs in the spring, and as much longer as may be found requisite, or as he may be inclined to stay."⁴ When Culley replied, giving the

¹ N.C.R.O., ZCU 31, G. Culley to Mr Colhoun, near Thetford, Norfolk, 9 July 1790.

² *Ibid.*, ZCU 44, G. Culley to Thos. Dawson, Dublin, n.d.

³ *Ibid.*, ZCU 17, Wm Key, Malton, Yorks. to G. Culley, 18 Aug. 1792.

⁴ *Ibid.*, ZCU 18, 21 July 1793.

prices which would be charged he received the following response, "I am sensible that the offer you are so good as to make of your own ewes would be, under ordinary circumstances, most acceptable. But we are here in a low priced country, and to give even three guineas a head for breeding ewes would, by the people of the country, be considered as the height of folly and extravagance. Nevertheless, it would I think be right for Lord Breadalbane to make the *experiment* in such a manner as to give it a fair chance of success. Suppose you were to send half a score of your own, and fifty of your neighbours' stock, with a ram at twenty guineas. . ."¹ On the back of this letter Culley has noted his reply, sending a tup for the season at 20 guineas, 10 of his own ewes at 3 guineas each, 20 of Mr Darling's at 29 shillings each, and 30 of Mr Chisholm's at 22 shillings each. These were among the more moderate prices, since at the same period Culley was selling his best ewes at 5 guineas. One of the financial difficulties which Culley met over his tup-letting and ewe-selling was of his own making. In 1797 he had an acrimonious correspondence with George Richmond over the amount of a bill due for sheep.² This was not uncommon and would seem to have been due to Culley's habit of stating a price, which the purchaser then said was too high and Culley replying that he would wait until the purchaser had seen how good the sheep were. Working on the assumption that the purchaser would be very pleased, Culley charged the original price whereas the purchaser, thinking he had made his point, expected a lower one. Despite these various problems the Culleys had built up a very profitable sheep trade by the end of the eighteenth century, and towards the end of one season George told John Welch, "We had some customers in the tup way yesterday, who took about £100 worth, we are now very likely to exceed £1,000, . . . a sum I did not at first look for, for £500 is certainly a very fair sum that way."³

Beyond their obvious success in sheep breeding the Culleys became well known for other aspects of improved farming practice. We have seen the considerable demand for turnip seed; their red wheat was also much demanded by local bakers and the correspondence shows that there was a considerable demand for the seed from farmers over a wide area and especially in Scotland. They also has a small trade in letting pedigree stallions and bred and sold some cattle. Of the latter they must have been fairly confident of their quality since George wrote to a Mr Walker, "we can spare 8 or 10 very useful heifers I think 2 & 3 years old, some in calf and some unbullied, . . . & the price shall be left to yourself. If you come . . . you could take a look at the cattle in the vicinity of

¹ N.C.R.O., ZCU 18, 16 Aug. 1793.

² *Ibid.*, ZCU 22, 29 Sept. 1797. Nevertheless the Culleys were far from being Shylocks in their approach to business. Compare, for example, the following comment from Matthew to John Welch (ZCU 44, 28 June 1801), "I am glad you have quitted your sheep, and I would not have you delay selling so long again, and by all means to avoid the name of hard or dear seller."

³ *Ibid.*, ZCU 44, 20 Oct. 1802.

Darlington. Thus, come in the coach to Darlington then go to Mr Collings, & he will furnish you with a horse to reconoitre [*sic*] the neighbourhood. And if you can suit yourself better there, may take a part or none of ours as you like."¹

As their fame spread, it is little surprising that more and more commissions should come their way. In the late 1780's Sir John Sinclair was sending sheep from a Scottish agricultural society for the Culleys to experiment with. In the early 'nineties Sinclair approached Culley for information in compiling *An Analysis of a Sheep Farm, managed on the Culley principles* and commenting that "Your mode of occupying arable ground, mixing sheep farming and husbandry, is, I am satisfied, the most profitable of any, & I want to give some account of it . . . from your answers to the inclosed queries."² Early in 1793 Culley was approached by Arthur Young for advice on the latter's intended purchase of a large moorland estate in north-west Yorkshire. With this acquaintance with the first president and first secretary of the Board of Agriculture, formed in the summer of 1793, it is not surprising that George Culley became involved in the preparation of the county reports on agriculture to the Board. He was initially invited to prepare the report on Cumberland and obtained the assistance of John Bailey, estate agent to Lord Tankerville of Chillingham Castle in Northumberland. The two of them then did the report on Northumberland. It was one of the best of the county reports, William Marshall, the leading contemporary writer on agriculture, commenting, "it is much to be apprehended, that, in going the round of the Board's Reports, *we shall not see its like again*."³ The report comprised a thorough survey of the agriculture of the county and went on to recommend all those improvements which the Culleys had introduced on their own farms in the previous three decades—the new crop rotations, careful stock breeding, 21-year leases, heavy manuring, the value of drainage, etc.⁴ When the county surveys were completed Culley was one of the favoured agriculturists requested by Sinclair to revise a complete set of the draft reports. Culley continued to be consulted on the various schemes of the Board of Agriculture and often had to show that these were poorly conceived, but never more so than with a printed circular sent out by Arthur Young to obtain information on the method of ascertaining the comparative merit of different breeds of sheep.⁵ To the question "what sort of sheep should be required, [for the comparison] a Ram, Ewe, or wether," he replied, "In my humble opinion this question comes absurdity in the face of it. For what comparison can be made or conclusions drawn from feeding a single

¹ N.C.R.O., ZCU 31, 2 Aug. 1790.

² *Ibid.*, ZCU 2, 6 Nov. 1792.

³ Marshall, *op. cit.*, p. 116.

⁴ G. Culley, *et al.*, *General Views of the Agriculture of the Counties of Northumberland, Cumberland and Westmorland*, 1805, new edn with an introduction by D. J. Rowe, 1971.

⁵ N.C.R.O., ZCU 44.

sheep of any of these sorts. I think the numbers of each kind should not be less than 10 and those lambs when weaned." Young's suggested method of comparison was "too complicated, because I apprehend it [comparison] does not depend so much upon the size . . . as that of paying most for what they eat. Therefore, that breed or kind of sheep must be the best which will produce the most pounds of mutton from a given quantity of food." The sting was then kept in the tail of the answer, "We have long given up the Idea of Merit being annexed to size."

In all this welter of new ideas and fame the Culleys made sure that materially their farming prospered. The following chronology¹ drawn up by the Culleys shows the rate at which their farming interests grew.

	No. of sheep	No. of neat cattle	Total value of neat cattle and sheep	
On entering Fenton in the year	1767 we had 1,078	30	£1,277 2 0	
	68 1,058	78	1,392 12 0	
	69 1,026	77	1,499 5 0	
	1770 1,053	110	1,745 16 0	
	71 1,074	126	2,000 13 0	
	72 1,310	129	2,279 11 0	
	73 1,080	111	1,895 11 0	
	74 1,210	123	2,264 19 0	
We entered to Westfield this year	75 wanting	150	2,350 17 0	
	76 1,133	200	2,372 3 0	
	77 1,431	236	2,706 9 0	
We entered to Eastfield this year	78 wanting	245	2,517 0 0	
	79 1,922	246	3,449 0 0	
	1780 1,881	228	3,152 11 0	
	81 2,283	313	4,113 1 0	
We entered to Redhouse this year	82 2,154	272	3,967 10 0	
	83 3,005	267	4,739 10 0	
	84 3,601	303	6,053 12 0	
We entered to Campfield and Marldown	85 2,710	317	5,264 2 0	
We entered to Wark and Grindon	86 3,270	415	6,800 10 0	We lost Eastfield and Marldown
	87 3,360	452	7,075 14 0	We lost Adderstone
	88 4,012	473	7,562 14 0	
	89 4,122	564	8,348 9 0	
	1790 4,181	556	8,126 1 0	
	91 3,921	588	8,392 8 0	
	92 3,875	610	8,547 0 0	
We entered to Eastfield new lease	93	3,390	524	7,954 0 0
We entered to Thornington & Longknow				
	94 4,441	552	9,026 10 0	
We entered to Shotton	95 4,424	515	8,814 14 0	We lost Fenton
We entered to new lease of Westfield	96 3,932	453	7,844 2 0	
	97 4,313	486	8,528 6 0	
	98 4,099	476	9,005 0 0	We lost Redhouse, this year is higher valued than any above.

¹ N.C.R.O., ZCU 33.

On 16 April 1781 Matthew, George, and James Culley signed a deed of co-partnership to run for 15 years. Matthew and George had taken Fenton for 21 years from 17 March 1767 and Crookham (also called Pallinsburn) Westfield for 21 years from 24 August 1774. All three brothers entered leases for Crookham (Pallinsburn) Eastfield for 15 years from 1 September 1778, and Prudlare Farm for three years from 12 May 1780.¹ In addition the three brothers jointly leased Grindon for 21 years from Whitsun 1786.² From 1783 Matthew was the owner of Denton, near Darlington, following the death of his elder brother Robert, and until his death in 1804 it was farmed by an agent, John Welch, with whom Matthew and George kept up an illuminating correspondence, mainly concerned with day-to-day running of the farm. It is interesting to note that Denton was used by the brothers for wintering cattle. On 17 September 1799, Matthew wrote to John Welch, "I wrote to you a few days since, & neglected to say that you should before this have said, how many feeding cattle can be wintered by you at Denton. The sooner they can be sent from hence [Wark] the better, as we would be enabled to keep the rest better, & prolong the time of putting ym to turnips, which are a very indifferent crop."³ For the sheep on the other hand it was their normal practice during the winter to bring them down from the hill farms to the low-lying farms where winter pasture was better. In one letter George comments, "It is happy for us that we have such a land of Goshen as Wark."⁴

When James died in 1793 the partnership was dissolved and the farms in the possession of the remaining brothers were as follows: Fenton for seven years at £750 p.a. to Whitsunday 1795; Grindon, 21 years at £900 p.a. to Whitsunday 1807; Wark, 21 years at £1,000 p.a. to May Day 1807; Westfield, 21 years at £260 p.a. to May Day 1796; Eastfield and the General's Close, 15 years at £330 p.a. to May Day 1793; Redhouse, £235 p.a. to May Day 1797. To these were added Thornington and Longknow, leased from Lord Tankerville for 21 years at £600 p.a. from 5 April 1793, and Shotton, 6 years at £100 p.a. from Whitsunday 1795, while the Westfield lease was renewed for 21 years in 1796 at £393 15s. p.a., and Eastfield for 15 years in 1793 at £483 p.a.⁵ On 21 March 1797 Matthew and George signed articles of agreement for an equal co-partnership in Wark (Matthew's residence), Eastfield (George's residence from 1795 when the Fenton lease was not renewed), Westfield and the General's Close, Thornington, Longknow, Shotton, Redhouse, and Grindon. The partnership was to be dissolved on 12 May 1807 when the Wark and Grindon leases expired, and Thornington was then to be retained by Matthew, and the others by George.⁶ It would seem that the partnership was

¹ N.C.R.O., ZCU 43.

² *Ibid.*, ZCU 46.

³ *Ibid.*, ZCU 6.

⁴ *Ibid.*, ZCU 44, G. Culley to J. Welch, 29 Jan. 1801.

⁵ *Ibid.*, ZCU 33.

⁶ *Ibid.*, ZCU 43.

dissolved early in 1804, since by an award adjudicated by John Bailey, Thomas Bates, and John Nisbet, Matthew assigned his interests in Eastfield, Westfield, the General's Close, and Longknow to George, and George assigned his interests in the remaining farms to Matthew and was to pay £1,109 as the difference in value.¹ In any event the death of Matthew in December 1804 would have dissolved the partnership. After this Matthew's tenancies came into the hands of his son Matthew, as did Denton, which was leased for a nominal sum to George. In his turn George found tenants for the Denton farms, since they were too distant for him to continue to run them. On 26 November 1806 the north farm at Denton was let to William Cumming for 14 years at £420 p.a., and on 23 January the demesne farm was let to John Wetherall for 15 years at £1,500 p.a.²

With the increasing size of the farms they controlled, the Culleys' prosperity rose. We have already seen the rise in the valuation of stock on their farms, but there are also a number of total valuations of farming assets. On the occasion of James's death, an independent valuation of livestock and implements on the five main farms gave a total of £14,495 15s., of which sheep made £7,509, cattle £3,283, horses £1,722, and implements of husbandry £525. To this should be added the valuation of corn crops at £5,251 16s. 4d.³ For 1798 a further valuation survives and this gives a detailed breakdown as in the table on page 172.⁴

While these valuations are obviously conservative and do not reflect contemporary market values (e.g. tups valued at £2 per head), they do reflect the scale of the Culley activities, which also extended to the ownership of a quarry, and lime- and brick-kilns to provide materials used for constructional and drainage purposes on their farms. The economic returns from the Culleys' farming interests may be seen from several annual farming accounts which have survived for the years around the turn of the century.⁵ The accounts would seem to cover only sales to and purchases from outside bodies by the Culleys, and to make no attempt to impute a value to the crops grown for consumption on the farms. This is suggested by the fact that of receipts of £25,700 in the 1799 account, £24,300 is stated to have been received on behalf of Eastfield and Westfield farms, whereas receipts for such large farms as Grindon and Wark were only £115 and £844 respectively. It would seem likely that the produce of the former farms was used for sale purposes and of the latter for home consumption.⁶ In 1799 the total profit of all the farms was given as just over £5,500, but it is unlikely that this was the genuine profit of the farms,

¹ *Ibid.*, ZCU 46, award dated 30 June 1804.

² *Ibid.*, ZCU 36.

³ *Ibid.*, ZCU 33, 6/9 May 1793.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 22 Nov. 1798.

⁵ *Ibid.*, ZCU 33.

⁶ Alternatively it may be that Eastfield and Westfield were the farms through which most of the Culley produce passed to market, and the value was given to them. But if this were so there would seem little point in the exercise of dividing payments and receipts by farm.

<i>Cattle</i>			<i>Horses</i>			<i>Sheep</i>		
Nos.	£		Nos.	£		Nos.	£	
Bulls	5	60	Work & riding	123	984	Tups	90	189 0
Milk cows	55	550	Young	31	186	Wethers & dimmonds	290	362 10
Feeding cattle	87	1,044	Foals	6	30	Fat ewes & gimmers	593	741 5
Working oxen	126	1,008				Flock ewes & gimmers	1,679	2,093 15
Young cattle up to 3	52	312		160	1,200	Tup & ewe hogs	1,447	723 10
Young cattle up to 2	69	345	Old swine	66	66			
Calves	82	287	Pigs	50	25			
	476	3,606		276	1,291		4,099	4,108 0*
Total no. of livestock 4,851 (201 less than 1797) value £9,005 (£476 1s. 4d. up on 1797).								

* This total is incorrectly added in the MS. and should be £4,110.

Wheat stacks	97 at £25 per stack	£2,425	
Barley	28 £20	560	
Oats and pease	104 £15	1,560	
Hay	17 £15	255	
Turnip seed		100	
Turnips and potatoes		1,239	
Household furniture and Farm utensils		400	
		6,539	Total £15,544

since a number of complicated payments and receipts on capital account (for purchase and sale of estates) were made. Since these entries are impossible to understand in the light of the little evidence given, a genuine profit figure is impossible, but adopting the most pessimistic interpretation it could not have been less than £4,500. The account for 1801 is straightforward (see table on page 173).

It is probable that 1801 was a very good year, since in the following year the profit made, after allowing for interest and rents, was £4,750, mainly as a result of the fact that receipts from sales of wheat were nearly £5,000 down on the previous year, although volume was only slightly less. The remaining payments and receipts in 1802 were much the same, except that sales of cattle and sheep each produced an extra £500. There are two features of the accounts particularly worthy of notice. Wages of the work-force accounted for between one-third and two-fifths of total expenditure. But more important than this is the amount of total revenue accounted for by arable produce. In all four years at the turn of the century, for which accounts are available, receipts from sales of wheat, oats, and barley exceeded (in 1801 were almost double) receipts from cattle and sheep; and in all years receipts from wheat sales alone always ex-

* This total is incorrectly added in the MS. and should be £13,628 16s. 2½d.

It is clear from these accounts that the Culleys had become prosperous by the end of the eighteenth century and this was signalled by a change within a dozen years, from 1795 to 1807, from being large tenant farmers to landed

proprietors. On 23 June 1795 the brothers purchased the estate of Akeld and Humbleton (on the River Glen above Wooler) for £24,000.¹ It became the residence of Matthew for the remainder of his life and then passed to his son Matthew. Six years later the 300-acre estate of Easington Grange was purchased for £13,000 and promptly let to a tenant farmer.² The final triumph came in 1807 when Fowberry Tower, with its estate, was purchased from Sir Francis Blake for £45,000.³ It was to be the home of George's son, Matthew, and was the place where George Culley died on 7 May 1813. By this time the Culleys had obtained a position in landed society and it was as landowners and politicians that the cousins Matthew were known in the first half of the nineteenth century. It is right that George Culley's should be the final words on this metamorphosis, "Whenever I am at Fowberry, I am struck with astonishment, when I reflect on our beginning in Northumberland 43 years ago. To think of my son, now inhabiting a *Palace*! altho' his father in less than 50 years since worked harder than any servant we now have, & even drove a *coal cart*!"⁴

¹ N.C.R.O., ZCU 43.

² *Ibid.*, ZCU 31, 30 Oct. 1801.

³ *Ibid.*, 24 June 1807, considerable sums of money were borrowed from banks at Berwick and Darlington to facilitate these various purchases, and were paid off out of farming profits.

⁴ *Ibid.*, ZCU 30, George Culley to his son, 3 Aug. 1810.

NOTES AND COMMENTS *continued from page 155.*

In his report Professor Minchinton noted that membership had risen from 687 to 707 and hoped that members would continue their efforts to make the activities of the Society known. It had been a successful year. The winter conference in London on 'Agriculture and the History of the Environment' had attracted a large audience and the publication of Professor Finberg's *Festschrift* as a supplement to the *Agricultural History Review* had been a notable achievement. Work was proceeding on the translation of a new edition of the classic work on European agricultural history by Professor Wilhelm Abel, *Agrarkrisen und Agrarkonjunktur* (*Agrarian Crises and Economic Fluctuations*) which the Society hoped to publish next year.

Finally he welcomed the new President and paid tribute to his predecessor, Dr Fussell, who had laboured almost alone for many years to create an interest in agricultural history when it was unfashionable.

The Treasurer reported that the Society's finances were still healthy despite the expansion of publishing activities. The Editor reported that she was pleased by the high standard of articles being offered to the *REVIEW*. A leaflet giving the names and addresses of members would be circulated with the next issue and a pamphlet on the bibliography of enclosure would soon be issued.

In conclusion the Treasurer thanked the retiring Chairman for all the hard work he had put in over the past three years and the meeting joined in expressing the Society's gratitude.

THE NORTH SCARLE COW CLUB

The centenary of an organization now probably unique in British Agriculture was celebrated in September 1970 by 15 farmers and, doubtless, 47 of their cows in a group of villages on the Kesteven-Notts. boundary, north of Newark-upon-Trent.

(Continued on page 191)