

The Sussex Breed of Cattle in the Nineteenth Century

By J. P. BOXALL

SUSSEX lies among the traditionally arable counties of south-east England. Yet, its livestock farming, perhaps more than most of these counties, had in the nineteenth century considerable claims to attention. From the late eighteenth century, when important developments took place in the breeding of Southdown sheep, right through this period, the Sussex Downlands were famous for their large, efficiently run sheep and corn farms, and for the prosperous, enterprising farmers who occupied them. The fortunes of many of these sheep breeders are, it will be seen, linked with another aspect of Sussex livestock farming on which it is intended to focus particular attention, that is, the breeding of the native Sussex cattle in the Weald.

At the end of the eighteenth century, John Ellman of Glynde, the farmer most responsible for the breeding of the new, improved Southdown, was also experimenting with the breeding of Sussex cattle. Many other, less well publicized farmers were following suit, probably with more success than Ellman. Among them, were two Southdown farmers from the Eastbourne area, Auger and Allfrey.¹

This activity, on the part of Southdown sheep breeders, to improve a breed of cattle which had always belonged to the Weald rather than the Sussex Downlands attracted the attention of the agricultural publicists of the late eighteenth century. Their opinions of the merits of Sussex cattle were overwhelmingly favourable. Arthur Young, junior, the author of the Board of Agriculture survey of Sussex, wrote that the cattle of Sussex "must be unquestionably ranked among the best of the kingdom,"² an opinion that William Marshall was later to affirm.³ Elsewhere, Young junior declared, referring to Southdown sheep and Sussex cattle, "we may search all England through, before we are able to discover any single county that is able to boast of these two articles of stock with as much regard to truth as the farmers of this county."⁴

The Sussex were most frequently compared with the Devons and the Herefords, two related breeds with the same reputation as the Sussex for producing

¹ *Sussex Agricultural Express*, July supplement, 1852 (for Royal Agricultural Society show at Lewes), article on Sussex cattle.

² Rev. A. Young, *General View of the Agriculture of the County of Sussex*, 1813, p. 226.

³ W. Marshall, *Review and Abstract of the County Reports—Southern and Peninsular Counties*, 1817, p. 495.

⁴ *Annals of Agriculture*, 29, 1797, p. 273.

prime beef. According to Arthur Young, senior, "The well known Sussex of Smithfield" were "preferred to most others common in that market." Neither the Devon nor the Hereford could equal the Sussex in size and weight.¹ Few other judges, however, thought that the Sussex, considered in every aspect, was the superior beast of the three. But it was generally agreed that the Sussex, already possessing many fine qualities, had been less improved than the Devons and the Herefords and thus promised in the future developments as rapid and successful as those being seen in the breeding of Southdown sheep.

The Sussex breed appeared to be spread widely over the county at this time, although it was particularly concentrated in the Wealden district. Marshall's estimate was that "on the whole, this breed of cattle may be considered as being in possession (as the established breeding stock) of the entire country between the Eastern division of the Chalk hills and the sea; the District of Maidstone and the Sea Coast of Sussex, exclusive"² in other words, the Wealds of Surrey and Kent as well as of Sussex. On the West Sussex coastal plain (Marshall's 'Sea Coast of Sussex') it was largely Devon, not Sussex, cattle which were fattened, but in the Weald as far west as the neighbourhood of Petworth and beyond, Sussex herds were numerous, and the Earl of Egremont, a large landowner in this area, was following John Ellman in attempting to improve the breed.

The turn of the nineteenth century was probably the period when the numbers of Sussex stock bred in the Weald reached a peak. Although, unfortunately, there is insufficient statistical evidence to demonstrate this conclusively, the recollections and writings of several Sussex men suggest this. William Wood, a farmer with long personal and family connections with the Weald, reckoned the years before the Napoleonic Wars as the time when Sussex cattle breeding was at its most extensive and when almost every Weald farm had its own herd of cattle.³ Henry Evershed, another writer with boyhood memories of the Wealden district early in the nineteenth century, shared this view, knowing of farmers who, through the success of their herds, had been able to purchase the land they occupied and pass it on with their herds to their sons. These herds had later been dispersed.⁴ John Farncombe, the author of the Royal Agricultural Society's prize essay on the farming of Sussex, remembered the Wealden system of rearing Sussex calves and taking them to market as draught oxen as widespread at the turn of the century. But by 1850, when he wrote his essay, it had become a thing of the past.

If Farncombe is to be believed, the first fifty years of the nineteenth century saw a catastrophic decline in Sussex cattle breeding. The pure Sussex breed

¹ *Annals of Agriculture*, 11, 1789, p. 186.

² W. Marshall, *The Rural Economy of the Southern Counties*, 1, 1798, p. 352.

³ W. Wood, *A Sussex Farmer*, 1938, p. 17.

⁴ *The Field*, LXXVIII, 1891, p. 286.

by 1850 was, in his opinion, "nearly extinct."¹ Another commentator on Weald farming, by his omissions, reinforced this view. The small farmers of the Weald, he claimed, generally kept two or three cross-bred animals—with some Sussex blood in them—largely for dairying purposes. He made no mention of large-scale rearing in the region.²

Yet the position around 1850 was almost certainly not as black as Farncombe portrayed it. The writer of the prize report on the farming of Kent, although conceding that insufficient attention was being paid to the breeding of Sussex cattle, found them to be predominant in the Kentish Weald. He was also aware of attempts to improve the breed and bring out qualities for which it was later to become famous.³ Farm sale advertisements in the local newspapers of the 1840's and 1850's do not support Farncombe's contention that pure Sussex herds were near to extinction. William Wood reconciled these seeming contradictions by differentiating the High Weald from the Low Weald: the breed had only declined in importance in the Low Weald; in the extreme east, the north, and north-east of the county in the High Weald area, it had not lost ground.⁴

In the first fifty years of the nineteenth century, then, it is evident that significant alterations took place in the farming systems practised in the Weald, though they probably differed in extent throughout this region. The Weald of Sussex covers a large area of the county and is very varied in composition, but, broadly speaking, it was in the nineteenth century an area of small farms and often impoverished farmers. It was a region that attracted the scorn of outside agricultural commentators almost without exception, who could contrast it effectively with the highly efficient farming of the South Downs. It had few areas of rich pasture and it was not ideally suited, as was the coastal plain region of West Sussex, to arable farming. But good quality corn, in particular, wheat, could be grown in the Weald, although the heavy clays of the Low Weald made the costs of production expensive. A mixed farming system was generally practised, but wheat was always considered to be the mainstay of the Low Weald farmer. The most charitable critics of the Weald farmers admired their courage in taking on Weald farms, and had to admit that at least they got some sort of living out of them, whereas improvers of the Alderman Mechi stamp quickly came to grief.⁵ The High Weald area of north and north-east Sussex presented a similarly depressing sight to nineteenth-century improvers. It differed from the Low Weald only in being less suited to corn growing, and in most of the High Weald parishes the cultivation of hops replaced wheat as the farmers' main source of cash.

During the Napoleonic Wars, high corn prices led to an increase in arable

¹ *Journal of the Royal Agricultural Society* [henceforth *J.R.A.S.E.*], xi, 1850, p. 82.

² S. Hawes, *J.R.A.S.E.*, 1858, p. 195.

³ G. Buckland, *J.R.A.S.E.*, 1845, p. 292.

⁴ Wood, *op. cit.*, p. 222.

⁵ *Journal of the Bath and West of England Society*, 1871, p. 30.

farming in the Weald, especially in the clay regions of the Low Weald, when much old pasture was ploughed up. This was undoubtedly the time when many of the old established herds of the Weald were dispersed.¹ In the High Weald, in Kent as well as in Sussex, this trend was less pronounced. The land was less suitable for arable cultivation: the soil was poorer, the terrain more heavily wooded than in the Low Weald. William Wood also suggested that the differing structure of landownership was important. In the High Weald region there existed several large landlords who could prevent excessive ploughing up of pasture on their estates. There were, indeed, some very large landowners, e.g. the De la Warrs, the Earl of Abergavenny, the Courthope family, in the High Weald who had very few equivalents in other parts of the Weald. In many Low Weald parishes, in fact, owner-occupiers were very common.²

In addition, the farmers of the High Weald, who cared for their hops above all else, had a greater need for good farmyard manure, which they used lavishly in the hop gardens, than the Low Weald wheat farmers. The rearing of cattle and fattening in stalls was an important part of their farming system.³ Cobbett, for one, was forcibly struck by the paradox that fine Sussex cattle of the High Weald had their origins in a region which he dismissed as being in a state of utter backwardness and impoverishment. "The forests of Sussex; these miserable tracts of heath and fern and bushes and sand called Ashdown Forest and St Leonard's Forest . . . these wretched tracts and the not much less wretched farms in their neighbourhood, breed the cattle we see fattening in Romney Marsh!" he was driven to exclaim.⁴

In short, the Sussex breed was preserved from the threat of extinction in one small part of the county, for the simple reason that farmers were prevented from snatching at the quick profits promised by wartime corn prices. What happened here in the years after the Napoleonic Wars is hard to discover. The post-war depression of prices did result in the selling of some High Weald herds,⁵ but since this region responded more to the fluctuations of hop prices, which differed from those of other prices, this trend may have been less pronounced than elsewhere. Although the Sussex breed survived through the Napoleonic Wars and the ensuing depression, it failed to sustain the interest and appreciation which it had enjoyed at the turn of the nineteenth century. Sussex farmers in the 1840's bitterly complained that farmers and agricultural journalists at national cattle shows treated the claims of the Sussex with indifference or amusement.

In the first fifty years of the nineteenth century, then, the Sussex breed had

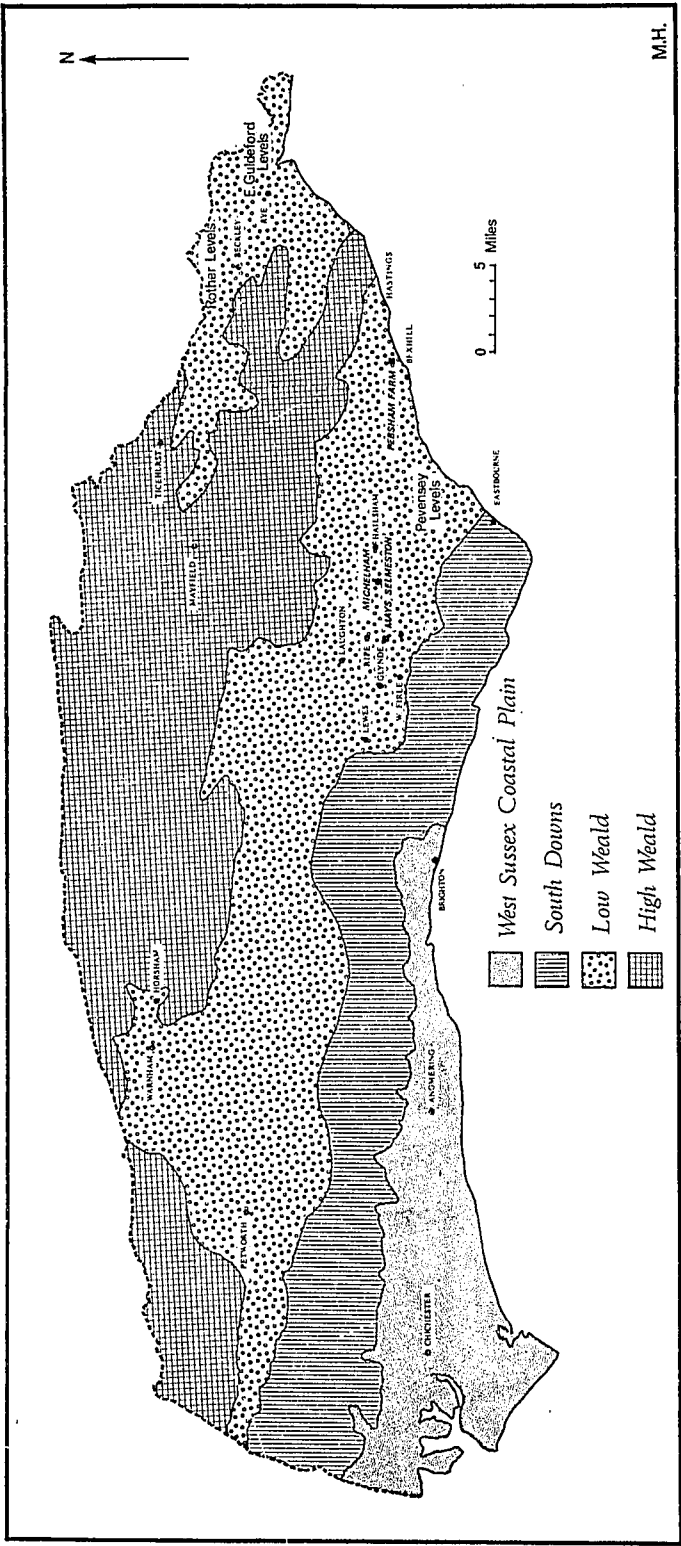
¹ H. Evershed, *The Field*, LXXX, 1892, p. 913; W. Wood, *Live Stock Journal*, xxx, 1889, pp. 169-70.

² Wood, *op. cit.*, 1938, p. 222.

³ W. Youatt, *Cattle*, 1834, p. 47; Buckland, *J.R.A.S.E.*, 1845, pp. 292-3.

⁴ W. Cobbett, *Rural Rides*, ed. G. D. H. and M. Cole, 1930, I, p. 220.

⁵ *Sussex Advertiser*, 19 Oct. 1840: speech of Samuel Selmes to Ticehurst Agricultural Association.



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suffered a decline in numbers and a decline in its national reputation as a beef producing animal. It was no longer classed alongside the Devons and the Herefords, which had in the same period maintained their standing and extended the area in which they were bred.¹ The Devons and the Herefords appear to have been supported by a more stable pastoral system than the Weald could provide for the Sussex breed.

The breeding of Southdown sheep in Sussex did not share a similar fate during the Napoleonic Wars. Expansion was uninterrupted, and the extension of Southdown sheep into numerous other counties continued to be rapid when Sussex cattle were shrinking in importance in the Weald. Downland was, of course, ploughed up for arable in the Napoleonic War era, but some of the new arable was employed to feed the sheep,² and no decline in numbers followed. The Downland farmers were, anyway, quicker to use artificial feed, which was not often seen in the Weald.

Livestock farming had always had its problems in the Weald. These centred on the difficulty of providing sufficient fodder all the year round. The loss of pasture during the Napoleonic Wars worsened the situation. Farncombe, in depicting the small Weald farmer relying, after his wheat or hops, on small scale dairying, had no doubt been near the truth, although he exaggerated the consequent decline in Sussex beef herds. Several farmers maintained that the free import of foreign cattle sanctioned in the early 1840's frightened many of the small Weald farmers, who still kept Sussex herds, and further encouraged a shift to dairy cattle.³ Since farmers were accustomed to ascribe so many evils to free trade legislation, it is impossible to judge whether this is correct. But an increasing shift of this nature appears to have taken place in the Weald in the first half of the nineteenth century, no doubt helped in certain areas by the expanding railway network.⁴ This growing interest in dairying created extra competition for the fodder supply of the Weald; and it was the custom of many High Weald farmers, faced by a fodder shortage in the summer months, to dispatch any Sussex cattle they possessed to the marshland around the coast, and so to concentrate their own resources on their dairy cattle.⁵ Many farmers, perhaps, in such circumstances dispensed with Sussex cattle altogether or went in for cross-bred beef and dairy stock.

During the winter months the Wealden farmers were also in the habit of keeping sheep which belonged to the Kent and Sussex marshland graziers and,

¹ J. Sinclair, *History of the Devon Breed*, 1893, pp. 62-3; J. Sinclair and J. Macdonald, *History of Hereford Cattle*, 1909, pp. 129-31; E. L. Jones, 'Economic Aspects of Breed Changes, 1780-1870', *Trans. Woolhope Nat. Field Club*, 38, 1964, p. 38.

² Young, *op. cit.*, 1813, p. 372.

³ *B.P.P.*, 1857, xiv, Qu. 1128-29; letter quoted in *Sussex Advertiser*, 6 Aug. 1872.

⁴ *Agricultural Gazette*, 3 Aug. 1872, p. 1053: Tunbridge Wells Farmers' Club discussion.

⁵ Youatt, *op. cit.*, pp. 46-7.

to a lesser extent, to the Southdown farmers. This must have been an expanding activity during the first half of the nineteenth century, and this further diversification of the livestock farming enterprises of the Weald farmer created even more competition for the inadequate fodder resources of the Weald.¹

Although the Sussex breed never became extinct—indeed, it was destined for a revival—its grip in this period, even in the High Weald, can never have been very strong. On the face of it, it is surprising that such a fine beef breed should ever have established itself in such an uncongenial environment. Not every Weald farmer, however, was a small farmer. There was a substantial minority of larger farmers in the region who probably owned the better ‘purer’ herds which survived the changes of this period. The Weald was never a district suited to the breeding or fattening of sheep: cattle were always the dominant livestock in its mixed farming system, however low its intensity.

The lack of outside interest in the breed did not deter the local breeders. There were many enterprising farmers who were determined to improve the Sussex beast and re-establish its reputation. Newspaper reports of local cattle shows reveal growing activity on their part from at least the early 1840's. In 1842, the local farming newspaper started to keep a list of herd pedigrees, and in 1855 a more formal Herd Book was begun. Price trends became more favourable to breeders and graziers, and the 1860's saw some laying down of land to pasture once more in parts of the Weald. The increasing use of artificial feed which many observers noted in the Weald around this time was a further aid to the expansion of livestock farming.²

The decline in the use of Sussex cattle as draught oxen also gave the improving breeders a chance to perfect the breed. The Sussex cattle of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries had been reared for a dual purpose. At about three years of age they were put under the yoke and, after three or four years' work on the farm, they were sold off to the graziers to be fattened. This system was on the decline in the nineteenth century as horses were increasingly substituted for oxen for purposes of farm labour. But in Sussex this process appears to have been much slower than in other parts of the country, and probably helps to explain why graziers considered the Sussex breed to be inferior to its two rivals, the Devons and the Herefords, during the first half of this century. In the 1840's, when early maturing Shorthorns were the fashion at national cattle shows, Sussex cattle were, not surprisingly, derided. This prejudice towards cattle that were employed as beasts of burden was often shared by local landowners, and possibly is reflected in the comments of John Farncombe, a local land agent: it was the tenant farmers alone who clung obstinately

¹ J. Farncombe, *J.R.A.S.E.*, XI, 1850, p. 82.

² *Land Utilisation Survey—Sussex*, 1942, pp. 498–9; H. Henderson, 'Arable in the Adur Basin, 1780–1931', *Jnl of the Ministry of Agriculture*, Oct. 1936, p. 630; *Agricultural Gazette*, 1863, p. 1162.

to their native breed. Their faith in the breed was well placed. As the use of Sussex draught oxen declined in the 1850's and 1860's, breeders were able to direct attention to removing features which had been useful when the ox team had been the predominant consideration, basically, that is, the cattle's heaviness of bone and its overdeveloped shoulders,¹ and also to produce a beast with a remarkable capacity for early maturity.

It was the activity of such improvers which brought the Sussex breed back once more into national prominence in the 1860's and 1870's. In 1875, Joseph Darby wrote that "until very recently while the Herefords and Devons had been steadily improving, Sussex cattle were admitted to be no better than they had been generations before." But now they were "as near perfect as possible."² In 1870, a local newspaper claimed that "the present improvement . . . is universally admitted by the public to be unexampled in the history of breeding."³ Reports of the Smithfield and other cattle shows of this time in the national agricultural press voiced remarkable enthusiasm for the merits of a breed which had emerged suddenly from obscurity. One Sussex farmer, who exhibited his cattle at Smithfield in the 1860's and attracted much favourable comment and interest, related how he was put in a state of confusion when his admiring fellow farmers insisted, in spite of repeated contradiction, that his cattle must be Devons and not Sussex. Which was the superior beef producing breed was always much debated, but at Smithfield shows from the 1870's, Sussex cattle frequently proved themselves superior to their two rival breeds in weight for age, and tests carried out in Chicago produced similar results.

The Sussex cattle which were now attracting admiration were fine beef producing animals, much sought after by butchers in the quality markets of the Sussex coastal towns. According to Henry Evershed, they were "second to none for early maturity." Instead of being fattened at around seven years, as under the old system, they were now often ready for the butcher at two years and, in exceptional cases, at eighteen months. In addition to this they were very hardy, economical animals, thriving on the poor pastures of the Weald.⁴ Sussex cattle were often criticized for being useless in the dairy, but in this respect they were no different from the Devons and the Herefords. The Sussex were always beef animals and were bred with this in mind. Only later in the century did some breeders come to feel concerned about this milking deficiency.

The re-emergence of the Sussex breed on the national scene from the 1870's was startling in its impact, to outsiders at least, and suggests remarkable activity on the part of Sussex breeders in the period, 1840-70. The farmer who was

¹ *The Field*, 30 March 1872, p. 281; W. Wood, *Live Stock Journal*, xxix, 1889, p. 159.

² 'The Claims and Pretensions of Sussex Cattle', *Jnl of the Bath and West of England Soc.*, 1875, p. 113.

³ Quoted in *The Farmer's Magazine*, 1870, pp. 126-7.

⁴ *The Field*, lxxx, 1892, pp. 913, 984-5.

most concerned in, and most frequently associated with, the improvement of Sussex stock was Edward Cane of Berwick. Berwick is a small parish in East Sussex on the edges of the Weald and the Downs and is situated near a tract of rich marshland otherwise uncommon in the Weald itself. John Ellman, one of the eighteenth-century improvers of Sussex cattle, had farmed nearby, as had several other less prominent breeders. Cane himself came from a prosperous yeoman family which had farmed close by at Ripe for several centuries. In 1861, he occupied just short of 3,000 acres, which made him one of the largest farmers in the county. At one time, Cane held seven separate large farms in the neighbourhood of Berwick.¹ Part of the land he occupied was on the South Downs, and he was a distinguished breeder of sheep as well as of cattle. He was the most active of breeders in attending local sales and buying up good Sussex stock to add to his herd. He was also in the 1850's and 1860's the farmer who did most to encourage other farmers to take more interest in the native breed and to exhibit their cattle outside the county. At Smithfield, he did much to bring the breed before the public eye.²

Second to Cane was Alfred Heasman of Angmering in West Sussex, who started the Herd Book in 1855, and who bought cattle from Cane's stock when Cane was forced to give up breeding. Like Cane, Heasman was not a Weald farmer. He farmed about 700 acres on the West Sussex coastal plain and, again like Cane, he was a well-known breeder of Southdown sheep.³

It is important to note that the two men most commonly associated with the improvements of this period were both non-Wealden farmers known for their sheep as well as their cattle breeding. Similarly, in the late eighteenth century, many of the improvers of Sussex cattle had come from the sheep and corn farms of the South Downs. Plainly, large arable farmers, such as Cane and Heasman, were much better situated than the average Weald farmer to buy Sussex stock which came up for sale. But there was probably more to it than this. The South Down farmers were "the aristocrats of the farming community"⁴ in Sussex, men of capital who took the lead in farming practice and in farming politics. Improvements were to be expected to come from them rather than the "smock-frock" farmers of the Weald. Sussex ox teams had long been a feature of the Downland farms. Often they were purchased from the farmers of the Weald and sometimes they were bred by the Downland farmers themselves. Many South Down farmers who had marshland attached to their farms fattened Sussex oxen which had served their term in the Wealden plough team. The Southdown sheep farmer was involved in the production of quality mutton for the local fashionable resorts and so could easily see a good

¹ *Sussex Agricultural Express*, 13 April 1878: obituary notice of E. Cane.

² *Journal of the Bath and West of England Society*, 1875, p. 117.

³ *Ibid.*, 1871, p. 38.

⁴ Wood, *op. cit.*, 1938, p. 71.

market for the beef producing local breed, if refinements could be made. Throughout the nineteenth century, Sussex imported large numbers of cattle for fattening purposes, Devon, Welsh, and Irish stores in particular, but there were frequent complaints from the graziers that the cattle they received were generally of a very poor quality and were not really suited to meet the demand from the high quality local markets. If the local breed could be developed as a prime beef producer, equivalent to the Southdown sheep, there would be a ready demand for it from both butchers and graziers.¹

Although several Downland farmers, particularly in the Berwick area, had played a prominent part in the improvements, they were a minority among the breeders as a whole. The breeding of Sussex stock has always been associated with the Weald. Registrations in the Herd Books never failed to show the overwhelming predominance of Wealden herds, and from the 1860's the number of Low Weald herds, which had suffered a setback earlier in the century, increased steadily at the expense of the number of High Weald herds. Herds were being registered even in the West Sussex Weald in the breed's former strongholds around Petworth and Horsham.

The Weald farmers did not take the initiative in the mid-century improvements, but they did make an important contribution to them. It was to the breeders of the Weald that the improvers of the Berwick area and elsewhere turned in order to enrich their herds. The parishes of Mayfield and Ticehurst in the High Weald were particularly noted for their Sussex herds, which had probably been passed down for several generations in spite of the upheavals of the early nineteenth century. One of the few local landowners to support unflaggingly the native breed had in the 1840's encouraged the Berwick improvers to look in this direction, and he was later to claim that the mid-century improvements were a consequence of his advice being taken.²

However, the more sought after herds, which appear again and again in the early pedigrees of the Herd Books, were generally to be found not in the heart of the High Weald but in parishes which lay between the High Weald and the rich marshlands of Pevensey and the extreme East Sussex border. In the latter marshland area, Samuel Selmes of Beckley, a grazier who occupied 5,000 acres, and who retired from farming in 1848, had possessed one of the most admired herds in the county.³ Closer to the Berwick area, Sussex cattle emanating from Mays farm, Selmeston, from Mitchelham in Hailsham, and from Pebsham farm, Bexhill, were especially coveted.⁴ The owners of these herds were Weald farmers, but they were very exceptional Weald farmers who

¹ *Agricultural Gazette*, 28 March, 1874, p. 388; W. Wood, *Live Stock Journal*, xxx, 1889, pp. 169-70.

² *Farmer's Magazine*, 1870, pp. 126-7.

³ *J.R.A.S.E.*, 1908, p. 292.

⁴ *Sussex Herd Book*, 1, 1879; *Sussex Agricultural Express*, July supplement, 1852.

occupied large farms and grazed cattle on the rich marshlands of Pevensey and, to a lesser extent, of Laughton. The proximity of these fine grazing areas had probably helped to retain the purity of these particular herds, whereas further inland the tendency of the small farmers to go in for a mixed beef and dairy enterprise had resulted in a greater prevalence of cross-bred animals.

In fact, it had been suggested early in the nineteenth century that there were two distinct kinds of Sussex cattle, one, even at that time, much more refined and improved than the other. Joseph Darby claimed that the more refined strain had always been found in the Pevensey area and was that predominantly used by the light land Downland farmers as oxen and then beef producers. A coarser strain was in use further inland in the Weald where its greater muscular powers were appreciated in tilling the heavy Wealden soils.¹ This suggests that considerable improvement had taken place in Sussex cattle breeding in the eighteenth century, at least in the Pevensey area. Furthermore, the Mitchelham and Mays blood, which was so sought after by mid-century breeders, is said to have had its origins in improvements made by two eighteenth-century breeders, Auger and Allfrey, who farmed in the Eastbourne area close to the Pevensey marshlands.² There is, therefore, in the Pevensey area, evidence of continuity between the late eighteenth-century improvements and the more striking improvements of the nineteenth century. Although the breeding of Sussex cattle suffered a setback in the early nineteenth century, the benefit of early improvements does not appear to have been lost. In the decades when the Sussex breed had such a low national reputation, pure Sussex herds were conserved by the farmers of the High Weald and some early-improved Sussex herds were kept intact by farmers in the Pevensey area. It was on this foundation that Cane and other mid-century improvers built. They were able to make further and crucial advances largely because Sussex oxen were no longer needed for the plough team. The breed's capacity for producing prime beef and for reaching remarkably early maturity could for the first time be readily demonstrated.

The rapid improvement of the Sussex breed and its revival in the Weald was, however, soon checked in the depression years of the late nineteenth century. Although the steep fall in corn prices and, a little later, of hop prices might, theoretically, have further encouraged the farmers of the Weald to shift the emphasis of their farming system more towards cattle breeding and fattening, their long established dependence on these crops left them badly exposed. The shortage of capital and, in some years, of ready cash to pay rents led, according to William Wood, to another wave of selling of Sussex herds.³ The decline in

¹ Young, *op. cit.*, 1813, p. 476; *Jnl of the Bath and West of England Society*, 1875, p. 116.

² *Sussex Agricultural Express*, July supplement, 1852.

³ W. Wood, *Live Stock Journal*, xxx, 1889, pp. 169-70.

beef and store stock prices in the 1880's brought to an end the favourable price conditions that livestock farmers had enjoyed for at least two decades. The only reliable standby for Weald farmers in such circumstances was milk production, and the agricultural statistics for the county show that, where transport facilities were good, this was an activity of growing importance. To a small extent this kept up a demand for Sussex bulls to cross with cows of other breeds and so to produce good dairy and beef animals,¹ but it did not halt a decline in the number of Weald herds. In 1894, one commentator expressed his surprise that the Weald could supply only a tenth of the local demand for beef, in spite of the butchers' preference for Sussex beasts.² The Herd Books of the 1890's indicate a shift in the location of Sussex herds towards and into Kent, a retreat of the breed to its old home in the High Weald region. In 1908, a Sussex cattle breeder from Kent lamented the decline in the number of large herds which had existed in the 1860's and 1870's, just as William Wood had lamented the loss of the herds which had existed before the Napoleonic Wars.³ Sussex cattle, of course, maintained their improved characteristics but they had failed to recapture their old predominance in the Weald as had once seemed likely.

The sale of Sussex herds in the depression years reinforced a trend which had begun during the Napoleonic Wars: a growing concentration of herds in the hands of farmers who both bred and fattened their cattle. Cane and Heasman had been farmers of this type, and so too were many of the other improvers of the Berwick area, whose farms usually had marshland attached to them. Herds were more and more falling into the hands of men of capital who had the facilities to combine fattening with rearing. As both breeders' and graziers' margins fell in the late nineteenth century, they had every incentive to follow this course. There were numerous complaints throughout the century from graziers that Sussex cattle were very hard to come by; this was, in part, caused by the predominance of the breeder-graziers which meant that less cattle were available for sale.⁴

Although farmers in the Weald operated a farming system which enabled them to shift their emphasis from corn to livestock and vice versa, they paid a price for this. It is, of course, much more difficult for a region to move from a corn growing to a livestock system. In 1889, William Wood claimed that the Weald was crying out for large-scale conversion to pasture and stock breeding, but had to concede that the farmers of the Weald, suffering from the collapse of their arable based system, were the last men who could furnish the capital to lay down land to pasture properly and build up new Sussex herds.⁵

¹ W. F. Ingram, *Victoria County History of Sussex*, II, 1907, p. 276.

² *Live Stock Journal*, XXXIX, 1894, p. 684.

³ *J.R.A.S.E.*, 1908, p. 119.

⁴ W. Wood, *Live Stock Journal*, XXX, pp. 169-70; *Sussex Advertiser*, 8 Dec. 1863; *Agricultural Gazette*, 9 Dec. 1878, p. 535.

⁵ W. Wood, *Live Stock Journal*, XXX, pp. 169-70.

A further obstacle prevented such a change in direction. The system of tenant right valuation in Sussex, or at least in the Weald, was never much admired. The payment which an incoming tenant was obliged to make, even for small Weald farms, was usually very heavy. Tenants could borrow capital for this purpose, but this only made the shortage of capital more acute. What was particularly inconvenient was that the customary payments for tenant right were mainly concerned with arable cultivation. In short, a farmer who altered the emphasis of his farming from corn to livestock faced the possibility that when he left his farm he would receive considerably less on the tenant right valuation than he paid when he entered it. Complaints about this inconvenience were not uncommon.¹

The Sussex breed appears to have received a blow during the Napoleonic Wars from which it never fully recovered. In the first half of the century it had been eclipsed by the Devons and the Herefords. Although its improvers had put it on an equal footing with these two rival breeds, it had never managed to catch up with them in national importance as breeding stock. Sussex cattle, being confined to a small corner of the country and being close to that part of the country dominated by the Devon breed, had only limited opportunities for expansion. On the other hand, they had the strong advantage of being the native breed, and although a few farmers here and there preferred to breed Herefords and, later, Aberdeen Angus cattle, they were never more than a few. In the extensive locality of the Weald, the Sussex breed faced little competition and was very favourably placed with regard to highly priced markets. Its failure to assert itself in an area where it had been widespread in the late eighteenth century illustrates well the havoc which fluctuating price movements could cause to livestock farming.

¹ *Agricultural Gazette*, 1863, p. 1162; *ibid.*, 1867, p. 190