

The Diary of James Warne, 1758*

By G E MINGAY

Abstract

James Warne farmed near Wool, between Dorchester and Wareham in Dorset. His was evidently a medium-sized farm, combining dairying with some arable, and Warne kept a diary which has survived for only the one year, 1758. The unusual detail of the diary throws a good deal of light on his farming activities, including visits to local markets and his frequent concern that the best use should be made of his wagons and teams. Most interesting, perhaps, are the casual manner in which he hired his farmworkers and the problems he experienced in disciplining them. Warne's periodical lending and borrowing of money also provides confirmation of the importance of the local network for private financial transactions which was available to the rural community before the full development of the banking system.

WE fetched in y^e last of our Wheat', wrote James Warne on 21 August 1758, 'blessed be God in very good order.' This pious farmer – he was a regular churchgoer and sang in one or another of the local churches every Sunday – also invoked God's blessing two weeks later when, on 6 September, he sowed turnips in a field that he had already dressed with 30 loads of ashes. 'When y^e ashes was spread, I had it harrow'd 1 time, then I sow'd y^e turnip seed and harrow'd it again once more after twas sow'd. I hope God will bless my endeavour and send me a good crop.'

James Warne farmed near Wool in south-eastern Dorset, within a few miles of the English Channel, an area noted for its dairy pastures and sheep. He was born on 17 April, 1726, the son of Joseph Warne, who rented a substantial farm (paying for it a rent of £200) at Bovington, to the north-west of Wool. The farm at Bovington was in the hands of the Warne family for at least three generations, descending in turn from Joseph Warne to his son James, the author of the diary, and from him to his son in turn. James Warne, however, did not succeed to the tenancy of Bovington until

1793, when he was already sixty-seven, and a large part of his farming career, twenty years of it to be precise, was spent at Woodstreet farm, which lay on the opposite side of Wool. This farm was situated about a mile to the south-east of Wool and some five miles west of Wareham, the nearest market town of any size, and it lay some eleven miles east of Dorchester, the county town. For a farmer Warne was probably unusual in his literary interests – on 17 April he spent a shilling at Wareham Fair on a book entitled *The Art of English Poetry*, and he himself wrote a number of poems in the form of acrostics on a variety of family and local subjects.¹ The diary which he kept for the year 1758, when he was aged thirty-two and was farming at Woodstreet, has survived,² and for its date is the most detailed and interesting document of its kind that the writer has been privileged to examine.

Like his father, James Warne evidently farmed on a substantial scale, employing both farm servants and day labourers, and keeping as many as nine horses, which were generally employed less in cultivation than in hauling his carts and his wagon, transporting produce or seed, as well as ashes, dung or river mud, and bringing to the farm other

* I am indebted to Mr Hugh Jaques and his staff at the Dorset County Record Office for kind assistance in my examination of James Warne's diary.

¹ Dorset RO, D 527/1.

² Dorset RO, D 406/1.

materials used as soil dressings. He owned a large number of dairy cows, some of which were let out, and others were milked in his own dairy at the farm. Indeed, we find him on 4 March 1758 making a purchase of 26 dairy cows for the sum of £130 8s, a large amount to lay out at one time. Some of his cows were managed on the Dorset dairy system, which Dr Pamela Horn has described.³ In Dorset the practice was for the farmer to entrust his dairy to a specialist dairyman, hiring out the cows at a fixed price which varied with the quality of the pasture and the value of the produce, and the system was already well established by the beginning of the eighteenth century.⁴ We find James Warne negotiating for the rent of his distant 'dairy of 12 cows at Piddle' (possibly Puddletown, or perhaps Piddlehinton or Piddletrenthide), and on 5 April he came to the point of signing an agreement with a dairyman. Warne had already noted in his diary that a neighbouring farmer had let his dairy of 60 cows for as much as £3 each, and it is clear that he was intent on expanding his own herd. Near the end of the year, on 2 December, he discussed the following year's arrangements with his dairyman, who, he noted, was as willing to milk thirty cows as he was twenty, 'if we can suit ground for 'em'.

A good deal of Warne's time in 1758, and that of his men, was devoted to making a weir and the ancillary arrangements necessary for watering his meadows, a practice popular locally for ensuring an early bite of grass for the livestock in the spring. His pasture lands not only supported his dairy and sheep but also provided a valuable source of surplus ryegrass seed and 'cowgrass' seed. The latter was all 'bespoke' by 18 March, when he had orders for his whole supply of between 400 and 500 lbs, which he sold at 7d a lb; and on 19 April his wagon, pulled by five of his horses, carried

a load of ten quarters of ryegrass seed to a 'Farmer Brimes' near Blandford, a distance of more than ten miles from Woodstreet. The arable was evidently a minor part of Warne's farming, although on 18 November he notes sowing 19 bushels of wheat seed in a field of just under five acres, and he had calculated on the previous 16 May that the yield of his wheat was about 12 bushels an acre, a rather modest return for the period. This five-acre field was the source of some difficulties with his reapers, since its name was 'Buckshill Six Acres', and the reapers evidently expected to be paid for the supposed six acres; but when on 23 August Warne and one of the reapers, Robert Phillips, measured the ground it was found to be only 4 acres 3 roods and 28 perches, 'and R.P. was very uneasy y^t I did not pay him for y^e full 6 acres'. The rate of pay for reaping, incidentally, was 4d per man per acre. The mowing of his meadows also gave rise to a similar difficulty: 'my Mowers are displeas'd because I measur'd it'.

An active, energetic and businesslike man himself, Warne was often annoyed by the slowness of his men when engaged in carting. On 27 September he had cause to complain about the carts not setting out until nine and working only until one; and on 8 December he ruefully recorded that two of his carts, with six horses, had brought up only four loads of gravel and one load of 'clots' (presumably either cow manure or clay), and carried away four loads of sand and dirt, 'and brought up y^e Chaff from Dairy Barn, a brave day's work. I'm provok'd to see how slow they are.' While his men proceeded on their tasks in this leisurely fashion, Warne himself was riding about the neighbourhood, visiting his father and friends and attending the local markets and fairs, noting carefully the prices that were being given. He recorded on 18 March that wheat at Wareham was fetching 6s 6d a bushel, and barley 25s a quarter, while ryegrass seed was at 9s and 10s a quarter.

³ Pamela Horn, 'The Dorset Dairy System', *Ag Hist Rev*, XXVI, 2, 1978, pp 100-107.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p 100.

On 22 April he went off to Wareham market to sell his butter and 10 pints of kidney beans (for which he received 3d a pint), as well as some bunch peas and black-eyed peas (at 2d a pint). At this market Warne 'ventured my Chance for a packet of Dr Axford and a Silver Punch Ladle he gave w^{ch} was got of a man of Wareham'. On 9 June he received a visit from a shopkeeper of Bere Regis, who had come some six miles to the farm in order to buy a pig: 'gave me 40s for it, but was a good pig'. Later in September he was sending off sheep to be sold at Weyhill fair, and earlier in the month, on 12 September, he himself had set off at three in the morning to sell 80 sheep at Wilton fair, and was satisfied to record that he had sold them all by seven for 16s each.

I

Accidents to livestock, and their illnesses, were constant problems for James Warne, as of course for every farmer – one of the aspects of eighteenth-century farming that has been rather neglected by historians. Accidents with horses, as we know from other diaries, were remarkably frequent, and sometimes, as James Warne suspected on one occasion, were due to the driver's carelessness or bad temper. On 21 November he found his young mare, Whitefoot, with an injury

in y^c side of y^c face under y^c eye. There is a round hole broke into y^c bone 2 or 3 inches deep. I think twas wth a punch of y^c whip, but if so he denies it and s^d she fell against y^c Post coming out of ground but I can't perceive how such a hole sh^d come if she did fall. He pretended he did not know of y^c hole til some of 'em saw her bleed at nose.

Veterinary medicine was practised locally by a Dr Barrett, although sometimes Warne relied on the advice of another farmer or treated the complaint himself. On 14 April he sent for Dr Barratt to see a sick cow: he was happy to record that the Doctor 'broke y^c Bladder under her Tongue, rak'd her and let her blood, and y^c cow done very well

again'. However, when on 23 May Warne found another of his cows to be sick he took matters into his own hands: 'Saturday y^c Dairyman saw y^c Cow I bo' at Blandford piss Blood and it continued Bad so I rode to Beer and got some red wine and Dragons Blood and gave her, and since dinner carr'd her some Toast and Ale.' The cow not responding to these ministrations, Warne was obliged to ask a farmer of Affpuddle, John Gould, to ride the six miles from the other side of Bovington 'to come and see my cow, w^{ch} he did in y^c AN [afternoon] and gave her a Drench and we hope she'll recover'. On 17 August Warne noted some trouble with his sheep, the fleas being busy, and accordingly 'tis difficult to keep 'em free of magots'. On 16 October he took steps to protect his fifteen calves from the fatal complaint known as 'Kill Calf', a precaution which involved a somewhat horrifying procedure known as burning and strapping. He so treated his '15 calves and Bled 'em all. We 1st bled 'em in y^c Neck then burn a hole wth a red hot iron in y^c dew flap and put in a tan leather strap and Tye both ends together so they are done. This is to prevent y^c Kill Calf in w^{ch} we lost 1 yesterday and lost 1 before.' On the same day Warne made an agreement with his father that his calves should be kept at Bovington, 'where they never dies of Kill Calf', and in exchange he would keep some of his father's two-year-old beasts.

II

We know from inventories and other sources that eighteenth-century farmers frequently lent and borrowed money, often having at the same time both loans outstanding and debts which they owed.⁵ An informal network of credit existed through which farmers and others with a surplus of funds could lend money out locally, at

⁵ See BA Holderness, 'Credit in English Rural Society before the Nineteenth Century with special reference to the period 1650–1720', *Ag Hist Rev*, XXIV, 2, 1976, pp 97–109.

interest, while those who were sufficiently credit-worthy could borrow for meeting a shortage of cash, to provide working capital or to finance large transactions. It is perhaps surprising that the importance of this ready availability of credit has been largely ignored in historians' discussions of the farming developments of the period, and of course it has particular relevance to the expansion of agricultural output and changes in methods and land use, as well as the ability of small landowners to meet the costs of enclosure. The working of this credit network is well exemplified in James Warne's diary. On 6 March, for instance, Warne had paid back to him a sum of £20 which has owed on a personal bond, and again on 8 November he received £15 (together with interest), part of a sum of £30 which was outstanding. At other times, when short of cash, we find him borrowing money. On 5 September he borrowed £10 from his father, and on 19 October some friends visited him at his house and offered to lend him money: 'I don't know whether ab' Xmas I m' not have 40 or 50£ of 'em'. On 20 December, however, he made up his mind to borrow from a Mrs Knapton of East Lulworth the sum of £60 'on my own Note of hand and I am to give her 4 per cent for it'. This was, incidentally, a very moderate rate of interest, lower than could then be obtained on a mortgage of land.

III

But perhaps the most interesting aspect of the diary is the light it throws on relations between the farmer and his employees, and particularly the problems of managing men who were so independent as to ignore orders and take themselves off without permission. Warne's labour difficulties of 1758 began on 6 June when he had 'some words' with his man 'R.L.' over taking Sundays off without permission: 'He went to Coomb (Coombe Keynes, two miles away) last Sunday and y^c Sunday before without my Leave w^{ch} he said he w^d not ask on a Sunday to go home

for his Shirt'. Later in June, on the 26th of the month, there was a further dispute with this man, when Warne became so angry as to strike him. It looked as if the fracas might end in the man's leaving, as 'RL was so affronted last n' y' he ask'd me if I w^d pay him and he w^d be gon for he w^d not bide to be Beet. But on my reprimanding him he took it into Consideration and went to Cart as usual.' On the 13th of the following month Warne had trouble with another of his men, one called Daniel Cobb. Cobb had refused to help milk the cows when ordered to do so, and went off 'out of y^c way and did not, but being come back before they was done I bid him agⁿ and on his refusing it laid him on with a little hazzle stick and He got a^{nor} [another] but did not strike me. Mr Fish and Mr Geward p^{td} us.' On the next day, 14 July, Cobb again refused to help milk. 'I told him if he did not he sh^d not Eat, nor w^d not let him, but Thrust him out of door and footed his Arse. He seem'd displeas^d at y' and w^d go away if I w^d pay him, but on my threatening to have him before a Justice he went and milk'd and made no more ado ab' it.' However, matters came finally to a head on 4 August when Cobb left the farm for good after another disagreement. 'Twas because I found fault wth him for penning y^c Sheep so soon last N^r for twas not 7 by my watch when he pen'd 'em.' Warne paid the man no wages when he left and so expected 'he'll fetch a warrant for me', but there is no mention in the diary of this development arising.

In the autumn Warne had fresh difficulties with a new servant, one John Antle, a young man of nineteen, whom he encountered on the road while taking sheep to Weyhill Fair. Warne agreed with Antle for him to come to Woodstreet, paying him four guineas for the period between 9 October and next old Michaelmas day. Antle soon got himself into scrapes. First, on 29-30 October, he absented himself for two days to visit Puddletown Fair. 'I saw him at Puddletown', Warne recorded. 'He staid there to

see y^c fair, but I was not very well pleas'd wth him.' On the following day Warne recorded that Antle (perhaps because of his activities at the Fair) had 'piss'd a bed Saturday night and Sunday morn before he went home for the Sunday. He made up y^c beds in y^c Garret but y^c Maidens had a Suspicion and found it out yesterday before he came home.' On 20 November Antle, after threshing half a bushel of oats, walked out of the barn and did not come back for his dinner. 'I must question him ab' this', Warne noted. And on the next day he duly did so, but Antle 'w^d give me no Ac^t so I set him to fill [load] dung today instead of threshing'. Yet again on 27 November Antle absented himself without leave, going to visit friends at Possham [unidentified] and not returning at all that night. He eventually returned about two on the following day, and so in the evening Warne made up his mind to discharge him: 'I p^d him 6s 1½d and bade him be gone and so he pack'd up his things and departed b' w^d have staid.'

There were difficulties that same autumn with another of the farm servants, one named George. George it was whom Warne suspected of injuring the mare with his whip; and before that, on 3 November when the ground was so wet that the cart wheels became stuck in the ruts, George had been responsible for damaging a dung cart. 'I told him after Dinner he sh^d go to Threshing or Take his Wages and go along but he s^d he sh^d go to Threshing and I talk'd wth him for twill not to do to have so many things broke.'⁶ Subsequently, on 22 November, Warne gave George notice to find himself another place by St Thomas's day, 21 December. Three days later George went off to Blandford 'to see ab' a place, but did not hire himself'.

On the 27th of that month both George and another man, Tom Hodges, absented

themselves without permission, George going to his home, and Hodges to see a spectacular outbreak of fire at Bloxworth, some six miles from Woodstreet. Then, on 11 December, both men were in trouble again, this time for disregarding instructions. Hodges was ordered to carry mud from the nearby river Frome, but instead accompanied George in carting rubble. 'They had 2 carts and 4 horses', Warne noted irefully, 'and other 5 horses staid in stables all day. Such dutiful Serv'ts have I!' During the next few days there were more difficulties in getting the men to cart mud, which was evidently an unpopular task. Warne himself helped to fill the carts in order to encourage his men, and it seems that George consented to assist. 'He was afraid if he did not work I sh^d not pay him and did not refuse going.' The carting of mud was also the cause of Tom Hodges' almost deciding to part company with Warne. On 15 December, after having refused to cart mud on the previous few days, Hodges appeared at the farm with his father. Warne 'reprimanded him pretty much. I told him if he w^d go to Mud cart and do what I had for him to do and behave as he ought, he might go to work, but he s^d that he w^d not go to mud cart, but his F^r chid him and he consider'd of it and went with Geo. and T. Hunt and y^c Dairyman.'

It might be thought that Warne was perhaps a harsh taskmaster; but if this was so it does not seem to have given him a bad reputation as an employer, for certainly he had no difficulty in finding men to work for him. On 12 February, a Sunday, Warne was scandalized to have a man call from Briantspuddle (six miles away) to ask for mowing work, and the same Sunday he saw Farmer Willshear of Grange going by, driving cows and calves for the morrow's Dorchester Fair. 'See how y^c Sabbath is regarded!' Later in the year he was in negotiation with a man to work as a farm servant, one who was also prepared to make lime. At first no agreement was possible for

⁶ The clumsiness of the labourers in handling implements was a matter of complaint by Arthur Young, who emphasized the need for strength and durability in farm equipment.

the man asked for the year's pay as much as £15 12s, 'w^{ch} is 6s a week all y^e y^r round'. Warne counter-offered £15 and a shilling a load for all the lime he should get, but eventually he settled on the man's original terms. Then on 16 December a Shepherd Coks of Bere came and agreed with Warne for his son, Luke, to come to work on the farm from the following Tuesday till Michaelmas for the sum of 45s 6d. On the next day, again a Sunday, 'One Homer of Rogershill, a young man, call'd. He hear'd I wanted a Serv^t and before we went to Church Jos. Applin of Shitterton call'd to ask for work. I'm like to have work folk a plenty', Warne commented with some glee. It is interesting that both Roger's Hill and Shitterton are near Bere Regis, at some six or seven miles from Woodstreet, though much nearer to Turners Puddle, where Warne had gone to live in a new house built for him by his landlord in May 1758. (He returned to live at Woodstreet again four years later.)

IV

Warne was evidently a man of some importance in his neighbourhood, and was chosen for Overseer of the Poor, although from his diary it does not appear that this proved a very onerous office. Indeed, the only difficult case which he had to deal with in the year of his diary was that of Anny Hunt. This woman, pregnant and near-destitute, came before Warne and his fellow Overseer and was eventually persuaded to swear, though very loath to do so, that a certain Joseph Alner was the father of her unborn child. She begged of Warne and his colleague that she should not be taken up, 'and wept bitterly but she c^d not prevail. Her fear was y^t y^e Child w^d be took from her and sent to y^e foundling Hospital.'

As an individual, James Warne comes across from his diary as honest, fair, pious and frank. He certainly showed a necessary firmness in dealing with the frailties of his

workpeople. As a family man he was clearly proud and fond of his wife and children, noting on 3 December that 'yesterday was 7 y^r ago I and my dear Spouse was married since w^{ch} God has been pleas'd to bless us with 4 sons'. During much of the autumn of 1758 Mrs Warne, Nanny as she was called, suffered from some prolonged illness, pronounced to be a cold when it first appeared, and she kept within doors. She was still unwell on 26 December, the day when Warne usually gave a feast for some people from Bere whom he supplied with turves for fuel. On this Boxing Day, however, 'Nanny continuing ill we had only a cold ham and bread and cheese and butter and what ale and cyder they w^d drink w^{ch} pleas'd most of 'em very well. They brag'd mightily on y^e cyder [of his own making] and drank very heartily of it.'

As a farmer Warne appears as knowledgeable and efficient, or at least, as efficient as his men would allow him to be. His mode of hiring men appears to have been entirely casual and haphazard, and he seems to have made no use of local hiring fairs. The frequent difficulties he had with his men may well have been quite commonplace, and the reader of the diary obtains a strong impression of farmworkers that, so far from being deferential and fearful of losing their employment, were self-willed, careless of orders, undisciplined and obstreperous when corrected. Certainly Warne's diary supports Young's strictures on the carelessness of the labourers in handling animals and equipment,⁶ and the difficulty of introducing anything smacking of novelty in the face of their negligence and indifference. Warne kept himself well informed of market prices and he had a wide acquaintance with the landowners and farmers of the neighbourhood. Whether he tried to be technically progressive is impossible to say from the evidence of only one year's record.

⁶ The clumsiness of the labourers in handling implements was a matter of complaint by Arthur Young, who emphasized the need for strength and durability in farm equipment.

Probably he farmed well up to the standard of the district, but there is no mention of his consulting the farming manuals of the period, nor, despite his daily travels over a wide area extending to some ten or twelve miles from his farm, is there any indication that he was interested in travelling further afield to observe the practices of other farmers. However, he was certainly far from being the darkly ignorant, suspicious and mendacious type of backward farmer

also castigated by Arthur Young⁷. Rather he gives the impression of being receptive to new ideas, and with his concern for the more economical working of the land he was a good example of the substantial, well-educated, forward-looking and cost-conscious farmer of his day, the type of man who contributed in his own small sphere to the contemporary progress of English agriculture.

⁷ Arthur Young, *General View of the Agriculture of Oxfordshire*, 1809, pp 35-6.

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