

The Pays de Bray: a vale of dairies in northern France

by Hugh Clout

Abstract

Survival strategies for the local economy of the Pays de Bray highlight the attractiveness of its 'green' landscapes of pastures, woodlands and orchards that contrast with the surrounding arable plateaux of northern France. The area has benefited from its relative proximity to Paris, its environmental resources, and the entrepreneurial skills of its farmers to develop an important range of dairying activities, comprising traditional farm-produced cheeses (*Neufchâtel fermier*) and numerous factory-made varieties, as well as butter. The history of this specialisation is traced from the mid-eighteenth century. Attention is drawn to the transformation of the discipline of distance as a result of road improvements and railway construction in the nineteenth century. Production increasingly became factory-based and although farm cheese production is now only a pale shadow of its former importance, it has recently received *Appellation d'Origine Contrôlée* (AOC) status.

At the start of the twenty-first century farmers throughout France are modifying their survival strategies in order to respond to the new requirements of the Common Agricultural Policy and to capitalize on the growing demand from urban dwellers for countryside recreation and enjoyment.¹ The Pays de Bray, spanning the thousand year old boundary between Normandy and Picardy, is being marketed as an area of woods and pastures, historic churches and *châteaux*, market towns and dispersed farmsteads that is very different in appearance from the surrounding chalk plateaux.² These characteristics were recognized by Gurney in 1845 as he visited 'this valley of much beauty and well-wooded both as to forests and to hedgerow timber, with a great deal of pasture, and both pasture and arable land covered with apple and pear trees for the purpose of making cider and perry; the effect of this is highly picturesque'.³ In addition to commodifying its landscapes, the *Association Culturelle et Touristique du Pays de Bray* has highlighted its traditional local products, including butter, cheese, cider and pottery. Attractive brochures and well-presented information panels include numerous examples of these products, describe the historic and natural interest of numerous sites in the Pays de Bray and identify specific 'routes' that may be followed by motorists, cyclists or ramblers to explore the woodlands, cider orchards, and cheese farms that are now recognized as heritage features.⁴

The present essay seeks to explore the evolution of the dairy industry in this 'green oasis' in

¹ B. Hervieu and J. Viard, *Au bonheur des campagnes* (sec. edn, 2001); id., *L'archipel paysan: la fin de la république agricole* (2001); P. Perrier-Cornet (ed.), *Repenser les campagnes* (2002); J-P. Sylvestre (ed.), *Agriculteurs, ruraux et citadins: les mutations des campagnes françaises* (2002).

² H. Clout, 'Le Pays de Bray: un lieu de mémoire',

Etudes Normandes 51 (4) (2002), pp. 87–99.

³ D. Gurney, *The record of the House of Gournay* (London, 1848), p. 255.

⁴ J-P. Fruit, 'La patrimoine agro-alimentaire revisité: l'accueil à la ferme en Pays de Bray', *Cahiers de l'Association pour le Patrimoine Industriel de Champagne-Ardenne*, 1 (2002), pp. 179–82.

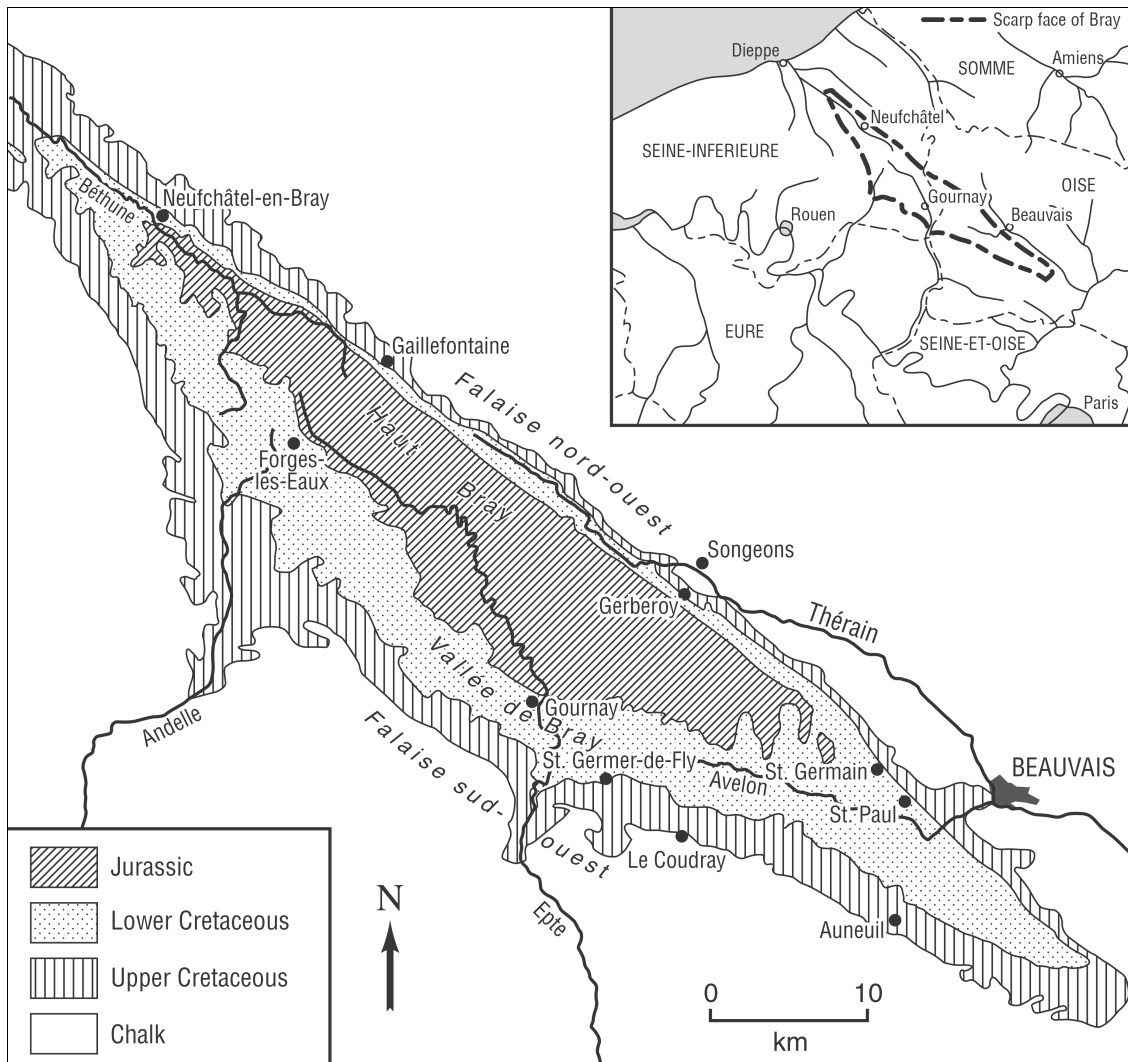


FIGURE 1. The Pays de Bray: geology and towns.

the denuded anticline of Bray that in local parlance ‘covers all the territory that is surrounded by chalk’.⁵ In 1869, Dieudonné Dergny went so far as to describe it as ‘flowing with streams of milk’.⁶ Conditions between the two scarps are extremely varied, with Bray being ‘arid where the iron-bearing sands come to the surface, and damp and wooded where there is clay. The higher areas [in Haut-Bray] become very dry in the summer heat, but are muddy and impassable after rain because of the decomposition of their marls and clays’.⁷ The relationship between

⁵ L. Graves, *Essai sur la topographie géognostique du département de l’Oise* (Beauvais, 1847), p. 34; the diversity of historic agricultural systems in France is discussed by J.-M. Moriceau, *Terres mouvantes. Les campagnes françaises du féodalisme à la mondialisation, XIIe-XIXe*

siècle (2002); also E. Le Roy Ladurie, *Histoire des paysans français de la Peste noire à la Révolution* (2002).

⁶ D. Dergny, *Le Pays de Bray* (Paris, 1869), p. 10.

⁷ Graves, *Essai sur la topographie géognostique*, p. 88.

land use and soil type is, of course, more complex than nineteenth-century *savants* implied but the *pays* is more readily identified from a geological chart than from a topographic map, since this button-hole shaped feature contains gentle hills as well as low-lying valleys and wetlands (Figure 1).⁸ With its numerous springs and streams, the Pays de Bray drains to the Channel and to the Seine, and supported extensive wetlands in the past. At the time of the Revolution, between Forges-les-Eaux and Gournay 'the springs are so abundant that they cannot penetrate the soil, giving rise to mists both morning and evening'.⁹ The core of Bray was wooded in early medieval times and underwent a long and highly contested series of environmental changes as seigniorial woodlands were degraded by livestock owned by surrounding villagers, whose customary rights (*usages*) allowed them to graze cattle and sheep, gather fallen timber, and enjoy other privileges across woodlands, heaths and marshes.¹⁰

In 1740, Duplessis characterized the *pays* as very marshy in its lower areas, with an abundance of grass suitable for fattening livestock.¹¹ Some ploughland was mixed in with the pastures but good wheat was rare since the soil was either sandy or heavy clay. Rye and mixed cereals grew better. The pastures were generally planted with fruit trees, and surrounded by thick hedges that offered shade but rendered roads impracticable.¹² Half a century later, the resources of the Pays de Bray were presented in a more enthusiastic light. The region contained

fertile pastures covered with herds of cattle that yield excellent butter and much cheese. Its industrious inhabitants fatten cows, calves and poultry; its orchards produce very good cider. Gournay [market] is an ever-flowing spring of provisions and foodstuffs for Paris. However, the upkeep of roads is neglected; traders cannot reach the remote countryside; ... if roads are not repaired urgently, trade and farming will languish, and Paris will go hungry.¹³

Not until the nineteenth century were the communal pastures finally replaced by the hedge-ringed enclosures that greatly enhance the appeal of this area.¹⁴ Problems of poor drainage and inadequate communication were tackled and largely resolved after 1850. The historic mixed economy, comprising grain, extensive grazing, some intensive dairying and numerous craft activities, was progressively replaced by dairying from enclosed pastures.¹⁵ In 1836 Moll insisted that 'the pastoral system predominates [in the Pays de Bray] ... and pastures occupy three-quarters of what is not covered with trees'.¹⁶ A decade later, Gurney claimed: 'The Pays

⁸ A. De Lapparent, *Le Pays de Bray* (Paris, 1879); C. Brioux and P. Labounoux, 'Le Bray de la Seine-Inférieure. Zones des herbages et des bouveries', *Annales Agronomiques* (1944), pp. 1–40.

⁹ Archives Départementales de la Seine-Maritime (hereafter ADSM), L 1779, Gournay: agriculture, An II, Commune de Merval.

¹⁰ H. Clout, 'The contested commonlands of the Pays de Bray' (forthcoming).

¹¹ T. Duplessis, *Description géographique et historique de la Haute-Normandie* (2 vols, Paris, 1740), I, p. 53.

¹² C. Gaudefroy, 'Le fromage de Neufchâtel: note historique', in P. Brunet (ed.), *Histoire et géographie des fromages* (1987), p. 141.

¹³ ADSM, F10 221, Extrait d'une lettre des habitants du

Pays de Bray, adressée au Ministre de l'Intérieur, 11 mai An II.

¹⁴ F. Cartier, *Etat de l'agriculture dans l'arrondissement de Neufchâtel* (Neufchâtel, 1822), pp. 21–3; H. Clout, 'The Pays de Bray: a study in land-use change, 1750–1965' (University of London, unpublished M.Phil. thesis, 1967); S. Lycklama, 'Vers une spécialisation agricole. Couchage en herbe et élevage en Pays de Bray, 1800–1850' (Université de Rouen, unpublished mémoire de maîtrise d'histoire, 1988).

¹⁵ R. Abad, *Le grand marché. L'approvisionnement alimentaire de Paris sous l'ancien régime* (2002), pp. 699–710.

¹⁶ M. Moll, 'Excursion agricole dans quelques départements du Nord', *Extraits des Travaux de la Société Centrale d'Agriculture de la Seine-Inférieure* 6 (1836), p. 94.

de Bray is now beyond any other part of France celebrated for the excellence of its dairies. The butter of Bray and the cheeses of Neufchâtel are known to all'.¹⁷ The prediction by geographer Jules Sion in 1909 that the whole of Bray would soon become an immense pasture proved essentially correct.¹⁸ Four years later André Siegfried aptly commented: 'the real capital of the Pays de Bray is Paris'.¹⁹ The present essay pays due attention to changes in competition, innovation, transportation and technology, and acknowledges the spatial variations in dairying activity that have emerged in the Pays de Bray. Well before the Revolution it was an area of precocious economic specialization that contrasted with the polycultural patterns of farming encountered in many other regions of France prior to the railway age. This distinctiveness was the result of spatial location and environmental resources combined with the ingenuity of Brayon farmers in responding to the ever-growing demands of the Parisian market.

I

During the *ancien régime* butter was made on numerous farms surrounding the market town of Gournay which is sited on the river Epte at the frontier between Normandy and Picardy. Paris was less than 90 km (22 leagues) away and the highway through Gisors and Pontoise avoided the unreclaimed wetlands and heaths of the commonlands of eastern Bray. The stretch of wetland extending north-westwards from Gournay to Neufchâtel contained 'excellent pastures, that are sometimes large but mostly small, all surrounded by thick hedges'.²⁰ Four types of improved pasture were recognized by Decorde in 1849.²¹ *Herbages* were delimited by hedges and covered with cider apple trees that were usually so densely planted that both their development and the quality of the underlying grass suffered. *Bouveries* were also hedged but lacked apple trees; many were drained by open ditches and served to fatten dry cows destined for the butchery trade. *Bas prés* were located in marshy spots, were crossed by ditches, and, as natural meadows, were mown rather than grazed. Finally, *prés secs* were located away from watercourses, were manured during the winter, and were mown for fodder. Together, these grasslands composed a highly distinctive environment that would be extended in the future as marshes were drained, woodlands felled, and ploughland converted to permanent pasture.

In 1768, Monsieur de Bacaton, *intendant de commerce*, reported that butter from several parts of the Pays de Bray went under the name of 'beurre de Gournay'. It was 'very much appreciated in Paris ... [reflecting] the quality of the pastures and the cleanliness of the dairies and all the pots that are used'.²² The newly created *Société Royale d'Agriculture de la Généralité de Rouen* also praised the quality of butter made in Bray.²³ The availability of various forms of fodder

¹⁷ Gurney, *Record of the House of Gournay*, p. 6.

¹⁸ J. Sion, *Les paysans de la Normandie orientale* (1909), p. 108.

¹⁹ A. Siegfried, *Tableau politique de la France de l'Ouest* (1913), p. 253. This early exposure to market requirements may well have contributed to the higher rate of literacy in the Pays de Bray than in surrounding areas. See F. Furet and J. Ozouf, *Reading and writing: literacy in France* (1982), pp. 158–9.

²⁰ J. E. Decorde, *Essai historique et archéologique sur la*

canton de Neufchâtel (Neufchâtel, 1848), p. 8.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

²² Archives Nationales (hereafter AN), F 12 650, Observations faites par M. de Bacaton, Intendant de Commerce, 1768.

²³ C. Joré, 'Mémoire sur les beurres, les laitages et le commerce du beurre salé dans le Pays de Bray', *Délibérations et Mémoires de la Société Royale d'Agriculture de la Généralité de Rouen*, 1 (1763), pp. 207–32.

from well-watered meadows, *herbages* and rough grazing was essential to its success, and farmers also recognized the need to purchase new cattle from the stock farms of the Cotentin peninsula in Lower Normandy each year.²⁴ Drawing from detailed observations made at Merval (just west of Gournay), Noël described how the milk was processed in cool, vaulted, brick-built underground dairies where the temperature was maintained throughout the year to prevent curdling.²⁵ These cellar-like dairies might require some ventilation in summer and gentle heat in the depths of winter; they were kept scrupulously clean, with outdoor clogs being replaced on entry.²⁶ Joré insisted that the taste and appearance of the butter did not 'depend on the soil but rather on the care taken by the producer'. He then compared the advantages of Bray over other areas, noting

We know of several districts in this province [of Normandy] where the butter is good and of delicate flavour in autumn and at the start of spring, but is rank and bad during summer. This is because conditions are naturally cool in spring and autumn (such conditions are achieved in the Pays de Bray throughout the year). But when the summer arrives, then the bitterness of the milk spoils the butter, making it insipid, even though local pastures are excellent. Presumably if conditions were further improved [in Bray] our farmers would not lose the relative advantage that they currently enjoy only in summer.²⁷

Joré's report alludes to the long-established rivalry between butter producers in Bray and those around Isigny in Lower Normandy (Fig. 2). Located over 240 km (60 leagues) from the capital, farmers from the meadows and wetlands of Bessin could dispatch fresh butter during the winter months without spoiling, but Gournay had the competitive edge in summer, being able to dispatch butter to Paris with little risk of deterioration. Farmers in both areas could 'supply the best butter in the greatest quantities possible', but the anonymous author of this memoir concluded that butter from Isigny was 'greatly superior to that from Gournay'.²⁸ Three months later, Monsieur Bodin of Gournay retaliated, insisting that butter from Bray 'is more able to conserve its substance and its fine, delicate flavour, whilst that from Isigny does not enjoy the same consistency'. He argued that dairy farmers and carriers from Isigny had heavy transport costs to bear; by contrast, producers in Bray paid less on carriage and could devote more money to draining and fertilising their *herbages*, and remunerating their cowmen and dairymaids.²⁹

Dairying was, of course, at the mercy of the weather, with exceptionally dry conditions, as in 1785, greatly reducing fodder supplies, curtailing butter production, and leading to increased prices. Writing from Neufchâtel in February 1786, Bezeuil reported that whilst farmers who normally received 9–10 *sols/livre* of butter were currently receiving 22–23 *sols/livre*, the cost of feeding their cattle had more than doubled.³⁰ In such circumstances of shortage, fodder prices

²⁴ AN, F 10 499, La société populaire de Gournay: rapport concernant la multiplication des élèves en boeufs, vaches, porcs et moutons, An II.

²⁵ S. Noël, *Essai sur le département de la Seine-Inférieure* (2 vols., Rouen, 1795), I, p. 8.

²⁶ ADSM, M, Agriculture. Statistique du département de la Seine-Inférieure, 1820.

²⁷ Joré, 'Mémoire sur les beurres ... dans le Pays de

Bray', p. 216.

²⁸ ADSM, C 188, Agriculture: Gournay. Mémoire sur les beurres d'Isigny et de Gournay, janvier 1787. See also A. Frémont, *L'Élevage en Normandie: étude géographique* (2 vols, 1967), I, pp. 57–66.

²⁹ ADSM, C 118, Agriculture: Gournay. Lettre de Bodin, 28 avril 1787.

³⁰ Ibid., Lettre du 19 février 1786.

were high and fewer livestock could be nourished.³¹ Late in the summer of 1786 dairy farmers from ten parishes between Gournay and Forges-les-Eaux explained to the *intendant* at Rouen that they had had to sell many of their cows for butchery since fodder was so short. They requested that 'a trustworthy man' be selected as their representative to travel to Cotentin, Maine, Brittany and other areas in the following spring to purchase replacement cattle that would be suited to the Pays de Bray. They insisted that dairying was of vital importance in 'over eighty parishes in the Pays de Bray, [whose] inhabitants only make butter and cheese, and raise livestock, all of which contributes to the well-being of the capital'.³²

As well as being sold fresh or lightly salted for local consumption, butter from the Pays de Bray was packed in earthenware jars with a layer of salt across the neck for dispatch to Paris and distant provinces.³³ Butter was also placed in wooden cases for export to tropical destinations in the latter decades of the *ancien régime*.³⁴ Milk and dairy products that were not required for butter served to nourish farmworkers, to fatten calves and pigs, and, of course, to make cheese.³⁵ During the 1820s, Gournay's weekly market handled, on average, 80,000 *livres* of butter, 800,000 eggs, and 'a great multitude' of cheeses.³⁶ As well as serving farms in Seine-Inférieure, substantial quantities of foodstuffs were sent from adjacent areas in the *département* of Oise, some of which were crossed by the new carriageway toward Beauvais.³⁷ However, by the late 1840s, the amount of butter sold there, at Neufchâtel and other local markets was declining since considerable quantities were sent direct from the farms to Paris, other cities, and even abroad.³⁸

Rivalry between Gournay and Isigny continued during the nineteenth century, with Giraudin remarking at mid-century: 'We certainly make better butter than in the past [in the Pays de Bray] but our farmers' wives will have to make considerable progress before they can equal the skills of their counterparts around Bayeux and Isigny'. This was reflected by the fact that butter from Lower Normandy commanded higher prices than that from Gournay at Les Halles in Paris.³⁹ Construction of the railway network worked to the relative disadvantage of the Pays de Bray, with Isigny being served by the Paris-Cherbourg main line as early as 1858 (Fig. 2).⁴⁰ As Brunier remarked: 'before the railways no area could compete with the *arrondissement* of Neufchâtel for sending butter, cheese and eggs to Paris. Now it is not like that, and will be even less so in the future. Products from Lower Normandy are in direct competition with those from the Pays de Bray, and as food is available in greater quantities, so prices have fallen'.⁴¹

³¹ Ibid., Lettre du 5 septembre 1786.

³² Ibid., Lettre des habitants de Mézangueville, etc., 1786.

³³ Joré, 'Mémoire sur les beurres ... dans le Pays de Bray', p. 228.

³⁴ Ibid., pp. 225, 229; J. Sion, *Les paysans de la Normandie orientale*, p. 247.

³⁵ Joré, 'Mémoire sur les beurres ... dans le Pays de Bray', p. 221.

³⁶ E. Anne, *Dieppe et sa région. Neufchâtel et le Pays de Bray* (1946), p. 107.

³⁷ L. Graves, 'Précis statistique du canton de Songeons', *Annuaire du Département de l'Oise* (1846), pp. 131-3; 'Précis statistique du canton de Formerie', *An-*

nuaire du Département de l'Oise (1850), pp. 102-4; 'Précis statistique du canton de Saint-Germer', *Annuaire du Département de l'Oise* (1851), pp. 115-17.

³⁸ Anon., 'Importance de l'industrie beurrière dans le département de la Seine-Inférieure en 1876', *Annuaire des Cinq Départements de l'Ancienne Normandie* (1878), p. 46.

³⁹ J. Giraudin, 'Notice sur la fabrication du beurre', *Extraits des Travaux de la Société Centrale d'Agriculture de la Seine-Inférieure* 15 (1849), p. 591.

⁴⁰ R. Musset, *La Normandie* (1960), p. 10.

⁴¹ M. Brunier, 'Souffrances de l'arrondissement de Neufchâtel', *Travaux de la Société Centrale d'Agriculture de la Seine-Inférieure*, 16 (1851), p. 438.

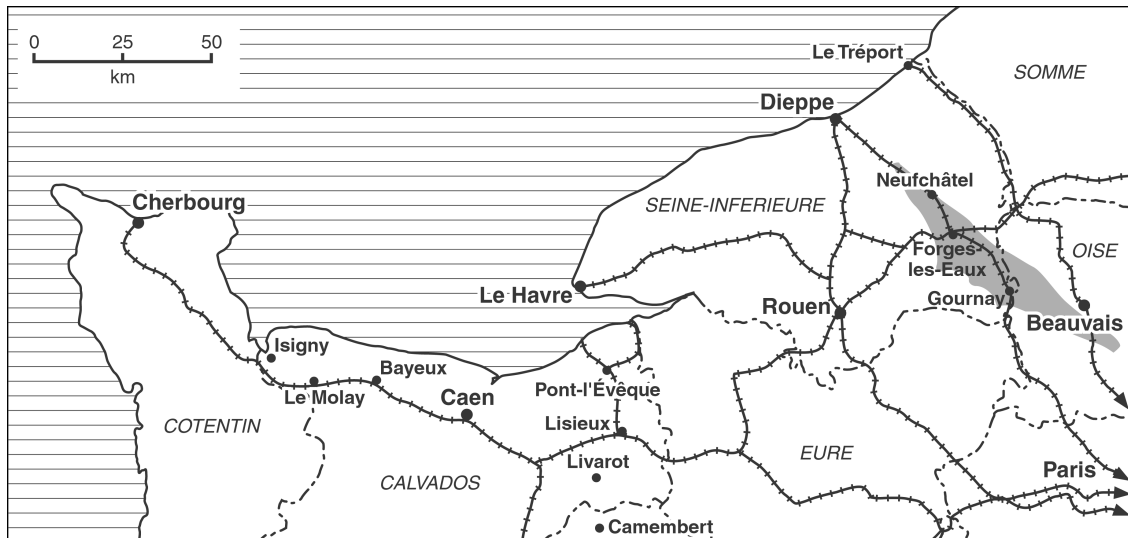


FIGURE 2. Railway network of Normandy.

Butter makers around Gournay responded to this new challenge by enhancing the quality of their product, so that in 1877 Delahaye could report that the town

has recently become famous for the quality of its products, especially its butter which can now rival that from Isigny. Undoubtedly the market [of Gournay] is one of the most frequently used within a radius of 10 leagues (40 km); the railway lines that have recently linked this area to Paris have given it a new life and have contributed to an increase in its wealth.⁴²

The population of Paris was growing rapidly and there was room in the capital's markets for many different suppliers. As Sion commented: 'the Brayons had thought they might be ruined but they were losing heart too fast'.⁴³ New outlets for butter were opening in London, now easily accessible from the Pays de Bray by rail and ferry (Dieppe-Newhaven). However, toward the end of the century butter from Denmark proved to be a formidable competitor, and Gournay butter had also to face growing supplies from Bessin, Cotentin, and Poitou on the Paris market.⁴⁴ The continuing enrichment of the Pays de Bray would have much to do with developments in its cheese industry.

II

The Pays de Bray is currently renowned for two quite distinct types of soft cheese; *Neufchâtel* dates back a thousand years, while *Petit Suisse* has only been produced since 1850. The first

⁴² M. Delahaye, 'Rapport sur le concours du Comice de l'arrondissement de Neufchâtel', *Travaux de la Société Centrale d'Agriculture de la Seine-Inférieure*, 29 (1877), p. 493.

⁴³ Sion, *Les paysans de la Normandie orientale*, p. 387.

⁴⁴ Anne, *Dieppe et sa région*, p. 107; C. Le Carlier de Veslud, *La transformation industrielle des produits laitiers dans le Pays de Bray* (1951), p. 31.

known reference to cheese making in this part of northern France is found in the Charter of Sigy (1037–45) where Hugues de La Ferté, cousin of the *seigneur* of the *comté de Gournay*, established the Abbey of Sigy in the Andelle valley and granted its monks the right to gather tithes on cattle, pigs, sheep, and cheese.⁴⁵ The Charter does not make it clear whether the cheese was made from the milk of ewes or cows, however the activity must have been flourishing to merit special mention.⁴⁶ Nonetheless, this is the earliest reference to cheese making in Upper Normandy, predating other sources by about two decades.⁴⁷ The region suffered the disruptive effects of the Hundred Years War, and the English were not expelled from Upper Normandy until 1449. The main task in the Pays de Bray was to rebuild settlements, reclaim heaths and marshes, and restore agricultural activities, all of which proceeded intermittently during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. By 1550, Neufchâtel was already famous for its heart-shaped cheeses called *angelots*.⁴⁸

A chance event during the reclamation of a lake in the Andelle valley in 1573 brought the Pays de Bray to the attention of the citizens of Paris. Members of the hunting party of Nicholas de Moy encountered a spring and remarked that its water reminded them of the waters of Spa in the Ardennes that were famed for assisting those afflicted with dropsy, sterility and other ailments.⁴⁹ A sample was analysed, the result was encouraging, and the town of Forges developed as a resort surrounded by woodlands and wetlands. However, the journey from Paris by carriage or horseback took several days, since road conditions were exceptionally poor in the marshy core of Bray. Forges-les-Eaux remained relatively inaccessible: 'only princes and princesses and *grands seigneurs* were able to make the journey in their carriages, together with their entourage and servants'. The fame of the resort was enhanced when the three main springs were named 'Royale', 'Reinette' and 'Cardinale' to commemorate the visit of Louis XIII, Anne of Austria, and Cardinal Richelieu in June 1633.⁵⁰ As others sought to emulate the example of the elite, Forges attracted a growing clientele who appreciated the soft cheese (*Neufchâtel fermier*) produced on local farms and were keen to consume it when they returned to Paris, Versailles or elsewhere.⁵¹

Neufchâtel fermier was made entirely from cows' milk, with the curds being drained and pressed before being moulded into shape, salted, dried, and left to ripen in cellars that were kept humid (95 per cent humidity) and cool (10–12° C). The cheese was turned every two or three days. After a week or ten days it started to take on a distinctive white bloom (*penicillium candidum*) and could be eaten after two or three weeks when it was uniformly covered. Some consumers demanded a stronger flavour, with the Neufchâtel being ripened until it adopted a reddish hue and gave off a distinct odour of ammonia.⁵² After having been ripened on straw-lined racks for a couple of months, the cheese would keep for up to a year. By the early

⁴⁵ Gaudefroy, 'Le fromage de Neufchâtel', p. 137; M. Ardouin, *Fromage de Neufchâtel* (1963).

⁴⁶ A. Bunel, *Géographie du département de la Seine-Inférieure* (Rouen, 1875), p. 167.

⁴⁷ Gaudefroy, 'Le fromage de Neufchâtel', p. 137.

⁴⁸ Bunel, *Géographie du département de la Seine-Inférieure*, p. 12.

⁴⁹ Anne, *Dieppe et sa région*, p. 33.

⁵⁰ F. Bouquet, *Histoire des eaux de Forges* (Rouen, 1893), pp. 14, 34.

⁵¹ Gaudefroy, 'Le fromage de Neufchâtel', p. 140.

⁵² R. Musset, 'Le Pays de Bray et ses fromages', *Annales de Géographie* 49 (1941), pp. 309–10; C. Brioux, 'Les fromages du Pays de Bray', *Bulletin des Engrais*, 242 (1938), pp. 524–26, 534–36.

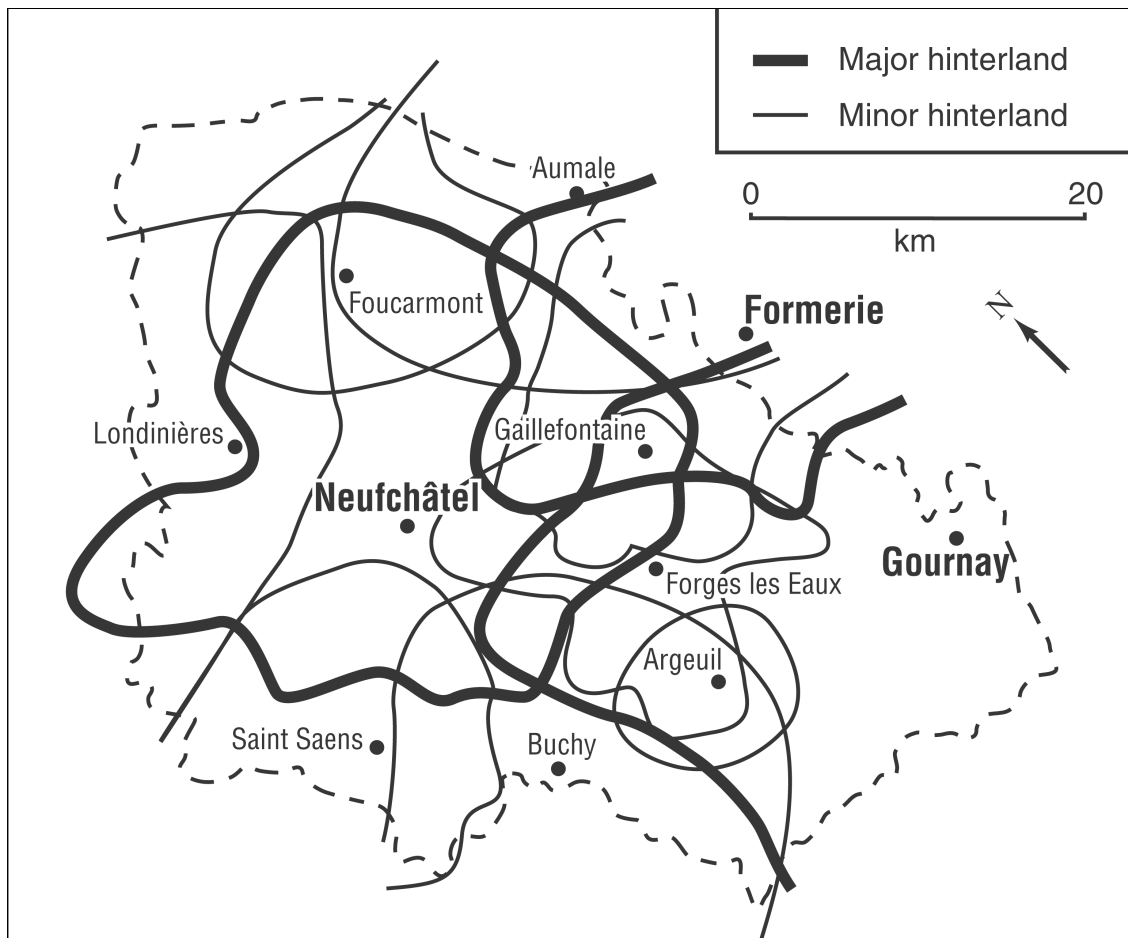


FIGURE 3. Hinterlands around market towns in the Pays de Bray.

eighteenth century, the *coeurs* or *angelots* of Neufchâtel were widely known and appreciated. Cylindrical shaped cheeses, *bondons* (4.5×6.5 cm), were also being made. Similar kinds of cheese were also made around Gournay and were shaped as squares (*carrés*) (6.5×2.5 cm) or flattened cylinders (6×8 cm). Parisians particularly appreciated *fromages de regain* that were made in October using milk from cows that had calved in August or September and been grazed on meadows from which the first crop of hay had been cut back in June. These were recognized as the best quality Neufchâtel cheeses, also being known as *gros doubles*. They were eaten young over the Christmas period or were ripened for eating in late May at Communion celebrations. Even after World War II some farmers ensured that their cows would calve in the late summer so that the milk could be used for making *gros doubles*.⁵³

Markets were held at Neufchâtel every Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday at which various shapes of cheese were sold, being 'so well known that their praises need not be sung'. The

⁵³ Gaudefroy, 'Le fromage de Neufchâtel', p. 140.

Saturday market was by far the most important with large quantities of cheese, butter, eggs, stock and grain being sold.⁵⁴ During the eighteenth century, new markets for dairy goods were established at Forges-les-Eaux, Gaillefontaine, Buchy and Formerie. The important market at Gournay continued to flourish, albeit with greater emphasis on butter than on cheese. The range over which each of these markets drew goods butter and cheese, and the standing of the local and larger markets which commanded substantial hinterlands can be seen in Figure 3. This is based on information given in the cadastral revision of 1879 on the markets to which individual communes dispatched their dairy produce.⁵⁵

On the eve of the Revolution, Neufchâtel cheese was being produced on farms within a radius of 16 km (4 leagues) of the town and the local population derived considerable incomes from this activity.⁵⁶ Their markets included Paris, Rouen and more distant towns, and hawkers (*colporteurs*) sold them in villages across Picardy and the Pays de Caux.⁵⁷ The 'discipline of distance' prior to the railway age afforded priority to butter around Gournay and to cheese around Neufchâtel (at greater distance from Paris), but despite relative advantages of location, resources and expertise, the core of the Pays de Bray still lacked good means of communication. In March 1789 numerous villagers complained in their *cahiers de doléances* about poor road conditions and urged that new carriageways be built to link Gournay to Forges-les-Eaux and also eastwards to reach Beauvais.⁵⁸

III

In the words of the local *savant* Jules Malicorne: 'travel by carriage was impossible [in parts of the Pays de Bray] during the eighteenth century. Farmers' wives were compelled to carry goods to market in baskets or on their backs or on the backs of plough horses in the case of richer farmers'. However, three royal highways (*chemins du roi*) crossed the area: between Rouen and Amiens, Dieppe and Beauvais, and Paris and Dieppe, with Gournay as their junction (Fig. 4).⁵⁹ The latter road was known as the *route des maréchaussées* (highway of the mounted constables) and was used by four-horse wagons to transport fresh fish from the Channel port to Paris.⁶⁰ Leaving Dieppe in the evening, these wagons reached the Faubourg Poissonnière of Paris and Les Halles before dawn.⁶¹ Two alternative routes existed for the first part of the journey, one passing through Neufchâtel and Gaillefontaine, and the other through Forges and Gournay.⁶² The Neufchâtel route 'serves thirty-two villages that can scarcely move their food-stuffs out to market during the winter, even by horseback ... [road improvements] would assist them to export cider that often remains unsold since outsiders are unsure of the tracks and

⁵⁴ Oursel, quoted in Decorde, *Essai historique*, p. 9.

⁵⁵ Similar, but less complete, information was provided in the cadastral revision of 1850. Both revisions are housed in the archives of the *Direction des Contributions Directes* in Rouen.

⁵⁶ ADSM, F 12 650, Commerce et Industrie, Bray, 1782.

⁵⁷ Gaudefroy, 'Le fromage de Neufchâtel', p. 140; Sion, *Les paysans de la Normandie orientale*, p. 247.

⁵⁸ ADSM, B, Cahiers de Doléances, Bailliage de Neufchâtel; E. Le Parquier, 'Le Pays de Bray en 1789', *La*

Normandie (1906), pp. 97–144; E. Le Parquier, *Cahiers de doléances du bailliage de Neufchâtel-en-Bray* (1908).

⁵⁹ J. Malicorne, *Recherches historiques sur l'agriculture dans le Pays de Bray* (3 vols., 1902), III, pp. 35, 38.

⁶⁰ M. Miellot, 'La chasse-marée et l'approvisionnement de Paris d'autrefois en poisson frais', *Annales des Cinq Départements de l'Ancienne Normandie* (1933), p. 30.

⁶¹ M. David, 'La route de la mer', *Présence Normande* (1961), p. 25.

⁶² Malicorne, *Recherches historiques*, II, p. 38.

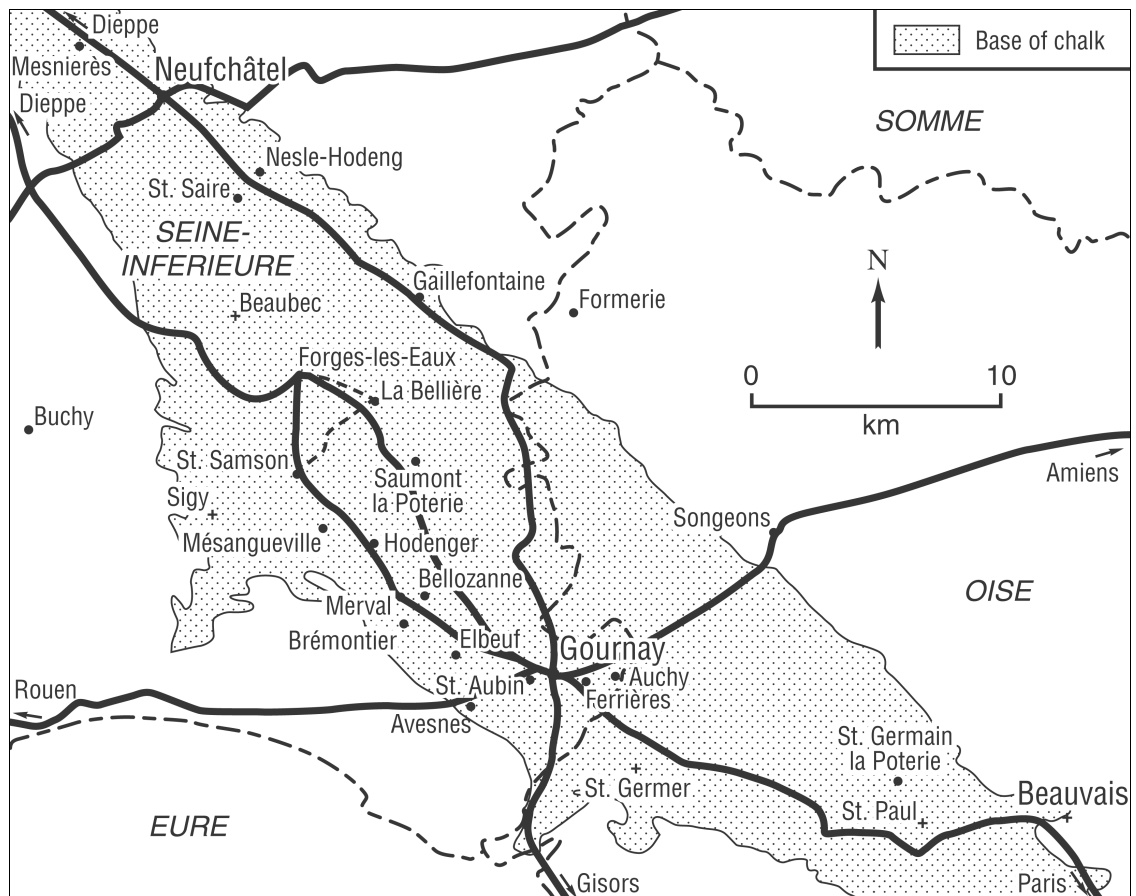


FIGURE 4. Highways and settlements in the Pays de Bray.

approaches to different farms'. In this clayey area of woodlands and enclosed pastures, 'most roads are narrow and deeply shaded by hedgerows and trees that keep them harmfully damp'.⁶³

The other route, between Gournay and Forges, was known as the *chemin des beurriers* (buttermakers) and was even more hazardous since it passed through the marshy core of the Pays de Bray. This was, however, the route that visitors attempted to use as they travelled to sample the waters at Forges-les-Eaux. They complained bitterly at conditions beyond Gournay, as they crossed the marshes and moors of Avesnes, Elbeuf, Brémontier, Bellozanne, Hodenger and Mésangueville. At this last village, 'travellers were obliged to leave the *chemin des beurriers* as it became completely impassable before Saint-Samson, and to follow tracks through the Forêt de Bray to reach La Bellière, then to cross the river Epte and finally reach Forges'.⁶⁴ By making this diversion, travellers avoided dangerous ravines at Saint-Samson and unreclaimed marshes at Le Fayel and Les Aulnays de Catillon. Nonetheless, there were

⁶³ ADSM, C 2170, Procès-verbal des séances de l'assemblée du département: Neufchâtel et Eu, s. d., p. 21.

⁶⁴ Malicorne, *Recherches historiques*, II, pp. 44–5.

numerous difficulties since carriages had to make part of the diversion up to their axles in standing water.⁶⁵ Because of these problems, the idea was mooted of a new carriageway from the capital to the Channel, serving Pontoise, Gisors, Gournay, Forges, and finally Dieppe.⁶⁶

Following the visit of Marie-Joséphé de Saxe (second wife of Louis the Dauphin) to Forges in June 1749, improvements were started on the highway between Gisors and Gournay.⁶⁷ Surveys for the new road between Gournay and Forges began in 1755, with work on the first sections starting ten years later.⁶⁸ By 1787 a few short lengths had been completed near the spa of Forges, at Saint-Aubin and elsewhere, amounting to no more than 3.5 km (2,000 *toises*). When finally constructed, the road would improve access between the capital, Forges and Dieppe; the Tuesday market at Gournay would also benefit.⁶⁹ The oft-repeated idea of digging a canal from Dieppe to Paris through the Pays de Bray came to nothing.⁷⁰

In 1786 Bodin reported on the dual difficulties of carrying butter, eggs, poultry and calves from surrounding farms to Gournay, and of dispatching goods thence to Paris. The royal highway east of Gournay was in a very poor state and vehicles travelling to Paris were 'almost always obliged to go on a longer route through Gisors', rather than Beauvais. If a new highway were built between Gournay and Beauvais 'the neighbouring part of Picardy would be further developed, since the foodstuffs it can produce could be marketed easily and cheaply through Gournay', unfortunately 'most roads from Gournay into Picardy remain bad and impracticable'.⁷¹ By contrast, the carriageway between Gournay, Gisors and Paris had been installed for four decades, was well maintained, and greatly contributed to supplying food to Paris. Conditions between Gournay and Forges were especially lamentable, and only two-thirds of the road surface between Gournay and Rouen had been laid, 'the rest of the route being very poor, and completely impracticable' for carriages during the winter. As a consequence, the citizens of Gournay preferred to travel to the capital than to Rouen, 'because the journey is very much easier'.⁷² Despite problems, Gournay attracted farmers from up to 40 km (10 leagues) and functioned as if it were 'almost one of the markets of Paris'.⁷³ Every Monday evening forty or fifty carts would arrive from Paris, Versailles, Saint-Denis, Saint-Germain, Pontoise, and Argenteuil, and would leave the next evening, laden with butter, cheese, eggs, poultry, calves, and game to reach their destinations before dawn in the cool of Wednesday morning.⁷⁴ Observers believed that the population of Gournay quadrupled on market day.⁷⁵

Although being piecemeal, every road improvement in the Pays de Bray enhanced the potential of the local dairy trade. Revolutionary legislation offered the opportunity of dividing commonland between villagers, and replacing wetlands, moors and heaths with enclosed

⁶⁵ David, 'La route de la mer', p. 27.

⁶⁶ Malicorne, *Recherches historiques*, II, p. 45.

⁶⁷ David, 'La route de la mer', p. 27.

⁶⁸ Malicorne, *Recherches historiques*, II, p. 46.

⁶⁹ ADSM, C 185, Subdélégation de Gournay. Rapport de Bodin, 29 août 1787.

⁷⁰ Noël, *Essai sur le département de la Seine-Inférieure*, I, p. 12.

⁷¹ ADSM, C 118, Agriculture: Gournay. Lettre de Bodin, 4 mars 1786.

⁷² ADSM C 185, Subdélégation de Gournay. Rapport

de Bodin, 29 août 1787.

⁷³ M. Potin de la Mairie, *Recherches historiques sur la ville de Gournay* (Gournay, 1842), p. 240; F. Laurent, 'Les concours des rameaux de Rouen et de Gournay', *Travaux de la Société Centrale d'Agriculture de la Seine-Inférieure* (1909), pp. 31–5.

⁷⁴ Potin de la Mairie, *Recherches historiques*, p. 343; ADSM, L 1819, Tableau des foires et marchés: district de Gournay, 18 ventôse An II.

⁷⁵ J. Soulas, 'Villes-marchés et villes d'industrie de Haute-Normandie', *Annales de Géographie* 44 (1936), p. 399.

pastures and fields. With respect to pastoral practices, the transition from collectivism to individualism, and from rough grazing to more intensively used enclosures, proved contentious and far from unproblematic in the Pays de Bray. The old order of rural organization was not without its defenders, but by the time that the taxation surveys of the *ancien cadastre* were undertaken (c. 1820–30) most traces of rough grazing had been replaced by swathes of *bocage*.⁷⁶ In the words of the rapporteur to the *Association Normande* in 1845: ‘the increase in *herbages* is indisputably the most important improvement in the *arrondissement* [of Neufchâtel] over the past forty years. Indeed, in many communes the area under grass has increased by half’.⁷⁷ Farmers were very attentive to the quality of their herds, buying fresh dairy cows from the Cotentin and elsewhere in Lower Normandy, as well as other cattle that were fattened for the butchery trade in Paris, Rouen, Amiens and Beauvais.⁷⁸

In 1817 the prefect of Oise *département* reported that work was in progress along the carriageway between Gournay and Beauvais, with ‘nine inches (*pouces*) of large stones being placed by hand and hammered into place, then covered by a further eight inches of pebbles’.⁷⁹ Similar progress was made on the other highways, but the section between Gournay and Forges was not completed until the early decades of the nineteenth century, by which time the fashion for sea bathing had created an additional imperative for a good road between Paris and Dieppe.⁸⁰ Minor roads between villages and market towns and out among the farmsteads were not improved until well after legislation of 1836 specified responsibilities and sources of funds.⁸¹ In 1844, Potin de la Mairie remarked that over the past decade ‘the number of roads has increased in the Pays de Bray, and others have been improved. But what is harmful to the roads, even the best in the Pays de Bray, is the constant dampness of the soil and the excessive price of road-building materials’.⁸² At mid-century ‘there were still certain villages in the Pays de Bray that could only be reached on horseback. Now [a quarter century later] the whole area has excellent roads, despite the nature of the soil that is very marshy in the Vallée de Bray’.⁸³

As new roads opened up the Pays de Bray, so new techniques of land drainage improved agricultural conditions. The area had a history of open channels and trenches being filled with branches or stones and then covered with soil. These approaches were successful to some extent, but much land remained to be drained in the middle years of the nineteenth century when piped underdrainage techniques were introduced to France from Britain.⁸⁴ The French government

⁷⁶ H. Clout, ‘The increase in the grassland area of the Pays de Bray’, *Erkunde* 23 (1969), pp. 20–29; id., ‘The retreat of the wasteland of the Pays de Bray’, *Trans. Institute of British Geographers* 47 (1969), pp. 171–89.

⁷⁷ Anon., ‘Rapport sur l’état de l’agriculture dans l’arrondissement de Neufchâtel en 1845, comparé à la culture ancienne’, *Annales des Cinq Départements de l’Ancienne Normandie* (1846), p. 551.

⁷⁸ M. Lelong, ‘Rapport sur l’engraissement des boeufs et des vaches dans l’arrondissement de Neufchâtel’, *Extraits des Travaux de la Société Centrale d’Agriculture de la Seine-Inférieure* 13 (1845), p. 335.

⁷⁹ Archives Départementales de l’Oise (ADO), Fic V(2), Conseil Général du Département de l’Oise. Extrait

du procès-verbal de l’arrondissement de Beauvais, 1817.

⁸⁰ David, ‘La route de la mer’, p. 27.

⁸¹ M. De Moy, ‘Rapport de la Commission des Recherches sur l’exploitation de l’arrondissement de Neufchâtel’, *Extraits des Travaux de la Société Centrale d’Agriculture de la Seine-Inférieure* 13 (1845), p. 301.

⁸² M. Potin de la Mairie, *Recherches historiques sur la ville de Gournay, Supplément* (Gournay, 1844), p. 339.

⁸³ Bunel, *Géographie du département de la Seine-Inférieure*, p. xviii.

⁸⁴ A. D. M. Phillips and H. D. Clout, ‘Underdrainage in France during the second half of the nineteenth century’, *Trans. Institute of British Geographers* 51 (1970), pp. 71–94.

distributed funds to agricultural societies to purchase pipes and to acquire pipe-making machines. Members of the *Société d'Agriculture de la Seine-Inférieure* realised the potential offered for improving the wetlands of Bray, and in 1851 the *Association Agricole du Drainage de l'Oise* was founded to propagate underdrainage and to create work for the poor and seasonally-unemployed agricultural labourers to the east of the Epte.⁸⁵ During the 1850s, machines for making pipes from local clays were installed at Saint-Germain-la-Poterie, Saint-Samson, Neufchâtel, Forges, and Saumont-la-Poterie.

Property fragmentation hindered the implementation of underdrainage in some sections of the Pays de Bray, but on larger, unfragmented holdings (such as the estate of M. De Bellozanne) the process was taken up with enthusiasm and considerable success.⁸⁶ It was as if 'the grasslands of the whole of Bray were surrounded by trenches, destined to receive drainage pipes'.⁸⁷ Results were generally successful, as at Gournay where 'damp pastures of the worst kind, where cattle became stuck in the mud if they were left out after October, had been so improved that, in spite of heavy rains, they could graze the drained land without being any more troubled by damp than if they were on a highway'.⁸⁸ Areas of peaty soil were also drained for grazing or cultivation.⁸⁹ After 1860, the *Société d'Agriculture* and the *Comice Agricole de Neufchâtel* rewarded many landowners in the Pays de Bray with medals and other prizes for their successful underdrainage.⁹⁰

The experience of highway building was mirrored in the construction of the earliest railway lines: these too avoided the Pays de Bray. Thus, the line between Paris and Dieppe that was opened in 1848 ran through Rouen and across the Plateau de Caux to the west of Bray. Likewise the line from Paris through Pontoise to Le Tréport via Beauvais did not enter the Pays de Bray. However, the new highway from Gournay made Beauvais an important trans-shipment point for certain foodstuffs, including *petits suisses* cheeses made at Gournay and Ferrières. Not until 1872 did the railway serving Gournay, Forges-les-Eaux, Neufchâtel and Dieppe come into operation, facilitating the distribution of Neufchâtel cheese and permitting an interesting innovation in organisation.⁹¹ Isidoire Lefebvre, a dairy farmer from Nesle-Hodeng, realised that the nearby station at Saint-Saire would assist his scheme for collecting curds from surrounding farms, shaping them in his dairy, and maturing them in his own cellars.⁹² His 'Triomphant' brand of cheese enjoyed considerable success, with large quantities being sent by rail to Paris, and to Dieppe for dispatch to London. Other entrepreneurs in the Pays de Bray emulated his

⁸⁵ J. Barral, *Drainage des terres arables* (4 vols, Paris, 1856), III, p. 113; ADO, F10 1636. Drainage: Oise. Association Agricole du Drainage du Département de l'Oise.

⁸⁶ Anon., 'Réunion à Gournay de l'Association Normande en 1856', *Annales des Cinq Départements de l'Ancienne Normandie* (1857), p. 176; J. Nacivet, 'Le Service des améliorations agricoles', *Travaux de la Société Centrale d'Agriculture de la Seine-Inférieure* (1909), pp. 58–60.

⁸⁷ Anon., 'Enquête agricole sur l'arrondissement de Neufchâtel', *Annales des Cinq Départements de l'Ancienne Normandie* (1903), p. 33.

⁸⁸ M. Marchal, 'Rapport sur les communications au sujet de drainage', *Extraits des Travaux de la Société Centrale d'Agriculture de la Seine-Inférieure* 17 (1854), p. 51.

⁸⁹ M. Manière and M. Fauchet, 'Essai sur l'état de l'agriculture dans le département de la Seine-Inférieure en 1860', *Extraits des Travaux de la Société Centrale d'Agriculture de la Seine-Inférieure* 22 (1863), p. 474.

⁹⁰ ADSM, M, Agriculture: Sociétés et Comices Agricoles. Comptes-rendus des travaux.

⁹¹ W. Diville and A. Guilcher, *Bretagne et Normandie* (1951), p. 60.

⁹² Gaudefroy, 'Le fromage de Neufchâtel', p. 141.

example of collecting and maturing Neufchâtel.⁹³ The prefect of Seine-Inférieure noted over 4,000 tonnes of cheese being produced in the *arrondissement* of Neufchâtel in 1873.⁹⁴ By the end of the century it was 'not rare to see 80–100,000 cheeses on the Neufchâtel markets' each week during the summer months. Almost all the milk produced in the Pays de Bray was being transformed into cheese on farms, at three cheeseworks in Gournay-Ferrières, or at isolated plants at Saint-Saire and Mesnières. In addition, a dairy at Neufchâtel was producing important quantities of sterilized and condensed milk.⁹⁵

IV

The great innovation in cheese making occurred not around Neufchâtel but in the environs of Gournay where farmers produced a similar product, typically shaped into a square or into a flattened cylinder, with a slightly drier consistence than *Neufchâtel fermier*. In addition, some Gournay cheeses were matured, with the cellars of the Ferme du Parc at Gournay, of Madame Herould at Auchy-en-Bray, and of Charles-Etienne Pommel also at Gournay enjoying a high reputation in the 1840s. Madame Herould also produced fresh cheeses (*fromages blancs*) but, unlike her neighbours, chose not to sell them on the local Tuesday market but dispatched them every day by horse-drawn wagon to a distributor at Les Halles in Paris. This procedure guaranteed maximum freshness and was particularly appreciated by consumers in the capital. She employed a number of Swiss dairymen and in 1850 followed their suggestion to add extra cream to the curds, to produce a much richer *fromage blanc* as was the practice in the Vaud *canton* of Switzerland.

In this way the first batch of *petits suisses* was made at Auchy-en-Bray. Charles Gervais, a young man from Fontainebleau employed by the cheese wholesaler in Paris, entered into business with Madame Herould and in 1852 they opened a new dairy at the Château du Manais at Ferrières, adjacent to the Gournay-Songeons road.⁹⁶ Milk was supplied from their company's own herd and from local dairy farmers in both Seine-Inférieure and Oise, within a 12 km radius of Gournay.⁹⁷ Gervais employed members of the Lagler and Reichmuth families from Switzerland and, with a genius for publicity, had the words '*Petits suisses* sent direct from the Vaud' or 'Coming from Switzerland' printed on the labels of his small cylindrical soft cheeses. This was indeed more than a white lie, but contemporaries excused 'this little stratagem since the cheese is good'.⁹⁸

At first, these rich dessert cheeses were taken by wagon to Paris but the opening of the railway between Paris and Beauvais in 1857 offered Gervais a faster means of transport.⁹⁹ For a dozen years the first leg of the journey to the capital was achieved by four-horse wagon to Beauvais, but in 1870 a line reached Ferrières-Gournay. Gervais relocated his cheese works to the Ferme de l'Estre, adjacent to the new railway, and sent curds and fresh cream in separate refrigerated

⁹³ M. Poincheval, *Fromages de Normandie* (1960).

⁹⁴ Gaudefroy, 'Le fromage de Neufchâtel', p. 141.

⁹⁵ Anon., 'Enquête agricole', p. 26.

⁹⁶ M. Pellet, 'L'origine des petits suisses', *Bulletin de la Société Centrale d'Agriculture de la Seine-Inférieure* (1939), pp. 16–20; Frémont, *L'Élevage en Normandie*, II, pp. 167–8.

⁹⁷ V. E. Ardouin-Dumazet, *Voyages en France* (66 vols, Paris, 1898), XVII, p. 82.

⁹⁸ Decorde, *Essai historique*, p. 137.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*; A. Delobez, 'La Vallée du Thérain de Beauvais à Creil', *Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, Mémoires et Documents (Géographie)* 7 (1960), p. 237.

wagons for mixing, moulding and packing at 25 Rue du Pont-Neuf, on the fringe of Les Halles in Paris.¹⁰⁰ With the two ingredients arriving by train in the capital about midnight, the *petits suisses* were ready to be taken to shops and hotels by dawn. Gervais' deliverymen wore the distinctive Normandy smock (*blouse normande*) that made them instantly recognisable on the streets. Gervais was not alone in this kind of enterprise. Charles-Etienne Pommel, who had moved to Gournay from the Puy-de-Dôme in 1839 in order initially to produce traditional *Gournay fermier* that he shaped into squares, also started to make rich double cream cheeses that were marketed as *petits Pommel*.¹⁰¹ By 1896 his dairy at Gournay had moved beyond the artisanal stage and was employing 25 workers, but this enterprise was far outstripped by the Gervais plant at Ferrières with about a hundred staff.¹⁰²

By virtue of this integration of resources, locational opportunity and business acumen, the preparation of ingredients for *fromages double-crème* and other cheeses had become the main industry of the market town of Gournay (population 4,000 in 1900, with a further 2,000 at Ferrières).¹⁰³ By 1905 over 200 people worked in the industrial dairies of the two firms.¹⁰⁴ The Gervais works processed the milk of 4,000 cows every day and produced a dozen types of cheese, with supplies being directed especially to Paris, Lille, and Brussels.¹⁰⁵ The Pommel factory received milk from 1,500 cows and sent cheese to Rouen and other towns in Seine-Inférieure and surrounding *départements* rather than to the capital.¹⁰⁶ Subsidiary activities included making wooden boxes for transporting cheese, and fattening pigs on nearby farms using *petit lait* from the dairies.¹⁰⁷ Workers at the two plants were allowed to take some of this back to their homes for that very purpose; and large numbers of pigs were sent to the market of La Villette in Paris.¹⁰⁸ Almost fifty Swiss workers were still employed at Ferrières-Gournay at the turn of the century.¹⁰⁹

After 1920 both firms enlarged and modernized their plants in the Pays de Bray, and Gervais opened new facilities in the capital to process and distribute what had been developed into 'industrial' products. However, the market for these double-cream dessert cheeses soon suffered the effects of the economic recession as well as competition from other products, including yoghurt and imported apples and bananas. In 1937 Gervais absorbed its smaller competitor and by the outbreak of war was operating plants at Ferrières-Gournay, Neufchâtel, Paris, Longueville (in Petit Caux) and Le Molay Littry (on the Paris-Cherbourg main line in Lower Normandy). The Ferrières works was bombed by the Germans as they advanced in 1940 and again by the Allies in 1944. This caused serious temporary disruption but allowed further modernisation, with Gervais employing 500 at Ferrières and 50 at Neufchâtel in 1950.¹¹⁰ Milk from 37,000 cows on 3,600 farms distributed across 70,000 ha was supplied to the Ferrières factory at

¹⁰⁰ G. Robert, 'Economie rurale du Pays de Bray', *Journal d'Agriculture Pratique* (1880), p. 32; B. Garnier, 'Paris et les fromages frais au XIXe siècle', in Brunet (ed.), *Histoire et géographie des fromages*, pp. 123–35.

¹⁰¹ Brioux, 'Les fromages du Pays de Bray'.

¹⁰² T. Canouville-Deslys, *Rapport sur le mouvement agricole de la Normandie* (Caen, 1896), p. 61.

¹⁰³ Soulas, 'Villes-marchés et villes d'industrie de Haute-Normandie', p. 400.

¹⁰⁴ Sion, *Les paysans de la Normandie orientale*, pp. 389–90.

¹⁰⁵ Anon., 'Enquête agricole', p. 27; Frémont, *L'Elevage*

en Normandie, I, pp. 159–54.

¹⁰⁶ M. Morière, 'De l'industrie fromagère dans le département de la Seine-Inférieure', *Annales des Cinq Départements de l'Ancienne Normandie* (1878), p. 108.

¹⁰⁷ Sion, *Les paysans de la Normandie orientale*, p. 390.

¹⁰⁸ Anon., 'Concours de la Société 1906', *Travaux de la Société Centrale d'Agriculture de la Seine-Inférieure* (1908), p. 51.

¹⁰⁹ Sion, *Les paysans de la Normandie orientale*, p. 390.

¹¹⁰ F. Canu, *Structure agricole optimum: le Pays de Bray* (1957), p. 35.

mid-century.¹¹¹ As René Musset remarked: 'the Pays de Bray lives in the shadow of Paris ... almost like a great Parisian farm', with Gournay's Tuesday market drawing commodities from farms up to 30 km away.¹¹²

V

Until the Second World War, production of *Neufchâtel fermier* continued much as before, with most dairy farms in the core of the Pays de Bray continuing to make cheese, at least for their own consumption if not always for sale.¹¹³ During the war farm-based production was disrupted and the overall quality of the cheese declined. The number of cheeses sold on the Neufchâtel weekly market fell from 30,000 in 1914, to 10,000 in 1938 and 3,000 in 1950. Direct sales of *Neufchâtel fermier* from individual holdings fell from 60,000 on the eve of the Second World War to 20,000 at mid-century. Collection of curds from individual farms for processing and maturing in central dairies and cellars was interrupted during the war; and after 1945 cheese works increased their production of *Neufchâtel laitier* direct from milk. Cheese making was changing dramatically and the artisanal qualities of *Neufchâtel fermier* were overtaken by much more homogenized factory-made products. At mid-century, the main Gervais factory, with 500 employees, continued to dominate cheese production in the Pays de Bray; four much smaller works employed only 80 between them. The Neufchâtel dairy producing condensed milk drew on milk supplies from 15 communes within a 30 km radius and employed 120 people. By this time, farm-based cheese production had effectively disappeared from the eastern section of the Pays de Bray but, together with butter making, survived around Neufchâtel and Forges-les-Eaux.¹¹⁴

In 1949 many producers associated themselves with an experimental label of quality for *Neufchâtel fermier* but the project was discontinued four years later. In 1957, farmers and agricultural advisers came together in a *Syndicat du Label du Fromage de Neufchâtel* that had the dual objective of encouraging the production of *Neufchâtel fermier* and enhancing its quality. Initial membership was 70 and during the first year 1,700,000 farm-made cheeses bore the 'label' of quality. The *Syndicat* was supported by the *Direction Départementale d'Agriculture* for Seine-Maritime, whose staff visited members' dairies to analyse samples of cheese, identify any shortcomings and promote good practice. It was soon discovered that very minor changes in procedure on some dairy farms could generate very good results. In the words of Poincheval: 'Every producer had their own ideas about cheese-making techniques, some of which were false and others were real aberrations'.¹¹⁵

In 1958 about 80 farmers were still making *Neufchâtel fermier*, 57 of whom belonged to the *Syndicat*, with the remainder operating independently. On average, 50,000 *Neufchâtel fermier* cheeses were made each week, giving a total annual yield in excess of 2,500,000. Two-fifths of these were sold direct by the farmers, with the remainder being handled by half a dozen collectors and distributors. (In addition, five factories produced *Neufchâtel laitier*, using milk from

¹¹¹ Le Carlier de Veslud, *La transformation industrielle*, p. 58; J. Corbière, *Les industries laitières en Seine-Maritime* (1960).

¹¹² Musset, *La Normandie*, p. 36; S. D'Arcier, *Gournay et le Pays de Bray* (1950), p. 75

¹¹³ Gaudefroy, 'Le fromage de Neufchâtel', p. 141

¹¹⁴ The previous paragraph is based on Le Carlier de Veslud, *La transformation industrielle*, pp. 31, 41, 46.

¹¹⁵ M. Poincheval, *Fromage de Neufchâtel*, p. 4.

individual farms or milk collecting cooperatives, and yielding about 4,000,000 cheeses each year.) The 'label' served as a guarantee of quality that was widely appreciated by consumers, but there were subtle variations in quality and flavour from farm to farm and week by week. In some cases cellars needed to be improved to ensure that temperature and humidity could be controlled effectively. Such changes required capital or loans, as well as modification in work routine for some producers. By identifying these technical matters, with clear financial implications, the *Syndicat* may well have led some older farmers with small herds to dissociate themselves from its activities, or to cease cheese making altogether. For whatever combination of reasons, membership of the *Syndicat* contracted to 37 in 1963, by which time only 1,200,000 cheeses were bearing its label, out of a total annual output of 2,300,000 *Neufchâtel fermier* cheeses. (In addition, three factories were producing 4,000,000 *Neufchâtel laitier* cheeses each year.)

By 1966 the total number of producers of *Neufchâtel fermier* had contracted to about 50, half of whom belonged to the *Syndicat*.¹¹⁶ Four firms that supplied grocery chains, large stores and hotels collected cheeses from its members. Four-fifths of the cheese made by independent producers was sold directly by them, with the remaining share being handled by the collecting firms. About one-fifth of the *Neufchâtel fermier* was sent to the wholesale market of Paris and to large hotels in the capital, with the remainder being dispatched to markets and shops in Seine-Maritime, Eure, Oise and Somme. Industrially produced *Neufchâtel laitier* was typically distributed through grocery and supermarket chains. In 1977 the *Syndicat* managed to obtain *Appellation d'Origine Contrôlée* (AOC) status for *Neufchâtel fermier*: this strictly defines the area in which it may be made. Regular inspections by members of a public control commission ensure authenticity and quality of production. Despite this accolade and a lively interest among local consumers and some visitors to the Pays de Bray, the number of farm-based cheese makers has continued to decline, with a total of 'under thirty' and 'precisely 27' being mentioned by two producers in September 2002.

V

At the start of the twenty-first century, the tradition of producing *Neufchâtel fermier* is a pale shadow of its former self, surviving on very few farms around the town whose name the cheese bears. Some holdings are identified along the way-marked *Route des Fromages* and welcome visitors. The *coeurs*, *angelots*, *bondons* and *carrés* of varying size, maturity, flavour and pungency still figure proudly on the weekly markets of the Pays de Bray and in shops in Normandy, Picardy, Paris, and occasionally further afield. The Gervais cheeseworks at Ferrières (now part of the Danone corporation) continues to draw milk supplies from a considerable hinterland and provides an important source of employment in the core of the Pays de Bray. The 'discipline of distance', albeit refashioned across the centuries, continues to exercise its power, with butter and *fromages double-crème* being produced closer to the Parisian market, *Neufchâtel* being made at greater distance, and butter production remaining significant between the two.¹¹⁷ Despite its authenticity and appeal, *Neufchâtel fermier* continues as only a fragment of a much greater

¹¹⁶ M. Sarasin, Direction des Services Agricoles de la Seine-Maritime, interviewed in 1966.

¹¹⁷ J.-R. Pitte, 'Une lecture ordonnée de la carte des

fromages traditionnels de France', in Brunet (ed.) *Histoire et géographie des fromages*, pp. 201–07.

gastronomic heritage, being outstripped by factory-made *Neufchâtel laitier*, *petits suisses* and other varieties, and by competing cheeses from numerous parts of France and indeed from much of western Europe. Nonetheless, cheese making has a contributory role to play in survival strategies for this part of northern France that, in 1844, was described as ‘a picturesque garden, where nothing is lacking; there are wild flowers and ancient trees, sun and shade, cool tracks, calm and rest’.¹¹⁸ In our time of globalisation, the exigencies of the Common Agricultural Policy, and the quest for sustainable development, this description remains largely true and offers real potential for ‘green tourism’ and related enterprises.

¹¹⁸ J. Janin, *La Normandie* (Paris, 1844), quoted in Anne, *Dieppe et sa région*, p. 107.