

Agriculture

At the time of Domesday Book in 1086, the main estate which belonged to the chapter of Lisieux contained land for three plough teams, with 3 a. of meadow and pasture measuring 4 furlongs by 3 furlongs.¹ The canons held land assessed for geld as approximately 3½ hides in demesne,² with one plough and two slaves, whilst six coscez and one villein held another plough.³ In 1066 it had been valued at 40s.; by 1086 it was valued at 70s.⁴ This estate comprised two carucates in 1318.⁵

The manor which belonged to Netley abbey possesses a good range of surviving accounts between 1396/7 and 1502/3., which can tell us much about the agriculture conducted by the lord, albeit not directly of the peasantry.⁶ Unfortunately, from this perspective, by 1396 the abbey had given up direct cultivation.⁷ It temporarily resumed this by 1403, and then leased out the demesne, again, by 1407/8.⁸ This was briefly changed to a lease of the whole manor in the early 1430s.⁹ Here as frequently on many chalkland manors, the leasing of the arable demesne was accompanied by continued direct cultivation of its large sheep flocks until 1453 and it

¹ *VCH Wilts. II*, 132.

² Domesday Book reckoned the estate as 3 a. less than 3½ hides: *VCH Wilts. II*, 132. The geld rolls described it as 3½ hides and ½ a virgate: *VCH Wilts. II*, 180–1.

³ *VCH Wilts. II*, 132.

⁴ *VCH Wilts. II*, 132.

⁵ *Cal. Inq. p.m.*, 1317–27, p. 126.

⁶ WSA, 192/32. For a general account of the farming of the area including Kingston Deverill, see, J. Hare, *A Prospering society, Wiltshire in the later Middle Ages* (Hatfield, 2011) and on Netley Abbey see J. Hare, 'Netley Abbey: monastery, mansion and ruin', in *Proc. Hants Field Club* 49 (1993), 207–27. Further work has led to some minor changes concerning developments on this manor which have been incorporated in this text.

⁷ WSA, 192/32/i.

⁸ WSA, 192/32/iii–v; vi.

⁹ WSA, 192/32/xxvii, xxviii.

provided sheep flocks for the lessee until at least 1492/3.¹⁰ The resumption of direct cultivation was accompanied by a dramatic programme of rebuilding, both for the accommodation of the monastic officials and monks and for agricultural buildings. In 1406/7, the abbey spent £6 13s. 6d. on a new hall, and in 1410/1 £24 13s. 9d. on a new chapel.¹¹ On the agricultural side, it spent £34.3.4d in 1408/9 on a new barn, which still survives, and £15 15s. 8d. in 1409/10 on a new oxshed and sheep house.¹² Maintenance continued, so that the barn received a new porch in 1462/3, and roofing repairs were required, as in 1464/5.¹³

During the four documented years when demesne arable farming was resumed (in 1403/4 to 1406/7) an average of 131 a. were sown. The most extensive crop was wheat with 40 per cent of the acreage, followed by barley (24.5 per cent), oats (21.1 per cent), and dredge (14.5 per cent).¹⁴ The pastoral sector was dominated by sheep which produced wool, meat and manure. Large number of sheep were sold each year for meat or further fattening. The importance of manure was seen in renting out the flock to various tenants for manuring.¹⁵ Wool###... By the early 15th century the proceeds of sheep farming were much greater than those of arable farming. Between 1403 and 1407, the sheep generated a gross income from sales of £15 for wool and £12 from sheep sales, compared with £12 from the sale of grain, but the labour costs of the arable was much greater. Already in 1396/7, the abbey maintained a full range of three distinct flocks: the breeding flock of ewes and lambs, the wether flock of castrated males, and the hogasters or juvenile. Altogether it possessed 721/726 sheep. Subsequently, it reorganised its sheep farming activities: it maintained a wether flock as before, but ceased to keep a breeding flock and instead used its manor in Waddon

¹⁰ WSA, 192/32/lxxvi.

¹¹ WSA, 192/32/ v, ix.

¹² WSA, 192/32 vii, viii; above, Landownership.

¹³ WSA, 192/32/xx; lii, liii.

¹⁴ WSA, 192/32/ii–v. Field names include westdene, eastdeneown, Kingshulle and Blokelong, Brokeforlong, super halle, Anlynge & wadeborgh, le clyve, baccombe foxlynche [to be checked ii–v].

¹⁵ WSA 192/32/xxxix, xl [?]

(Dorset) as a specialist breeding centre, the young sheep being brought to Kingston Deverill. In the first quarter of the 15th century, the abbey maintained a flock of over 700 sheep reaching peaks of over 1,000 in 1405 and 1408, and averaging 926 between 1403 and 1412.¹⁶ It continued to be run directly by the abbey until 1453.

The leasing of the demesne went to a single tenant and did not lead to a breakup of the demesne. Leasing provided opportunities both for existing members of the village elite as well as for those from outside. Stephen Badcock was initially a reeve before leasing the demesne, and his family can be traced here back in the 14th century. John Daniel was followed by his wife and son Stephen, while the latter's successor (John Bartram) was probably an outsider from Dorset who had married Stephen's widow. This would have meant that a single family had leased the demesne for over half a century and would thus have clearly shown that the family was separated from the rest of the village.¹⁷ Stephen's bequest at his death included at least 500 sheep, which showed the large scale of his own farming activities.¹⁸ Great farm was leased from the abbey of Netley by Cuthbert Michell in 1531, with land called 'Bourdland' and a wood called 'Bythley'.¹⁹

Of the other estates, In 1503 the Stantor's manor of Kingston Deverill comprised 200 a. of land, 100 a. of pasture and 1 a. of wood.²⁰ In 1303, Henry de Kingston held an estate from Netley comprising two carucates and a virgate of land..²¹ In 1468 this comprised 140 a. of land.²² In 1603, Bodenham's farm comprised 200 a. of arable, 40 a.

¹⁶ WSA, 192/32/i–xlili

¹⁷ WSA, 192/32 xl–lxxii ; TNA PROB 11/61/279 (John), PROB 11/33/354 (Cutbert), PROB 11/35/38 (Margaret).

¹⁸ For the suggested relationships see wills (TNA PROB 11/8/121 and 17/25). Bartram had probably come from Winterbourne Martyn (Dorset).

¹⁹ TNA, LR 2/86, ff. 34d, 94–95.

²⁰ *Cal. Inq. p.m., Hen. VII, 1497–1505*, pp. 453–54.

²¹ *Cat. Anct. Deeds*, III, pp. 442–3 [D. 323]; TNA, E 42/182.

²² *Cal. Inq. Misc.*, 1422–85, p. 214.

of meadow, 60 a. of pasture, and 10 a. of woodland.²³ In 1670 Bodenham's farm comprised 180 a. of arable, 16 a. of meadow, and 220 a. of down, with a coppice called Hiscombe.²⁴ There was woodland: Marcombe had a coppice belonging to the King's manor and measuring 40 a. in 1651.²⁵ There was a wood at Bythele (Bytel) and one at Holmercombe²⁶ [*This paragraph may need to be changed once manors have been sorted*]

Agriculture in the early modern period was marked by continuity. It was still based on the open fields as shown in the map of 1748,²⁷ until enclosure in 1785. ²⁸ Its mixed farming continued to be based on arable and large-scale sheep flocks as reflected in the inventory of Robert Hurle, a wealthy tenant in September, 1696.²⁹ It is possible that he leased the demesne and certainly kept sheep on a massive scale. His inventory shows that he had a flock of 1,010 sheep with the three main flocks (breeding, juvenile and wether, as well as 100 fat sheep, fattened for sale. The cattle included nine milk cows, reflected in 400 cheeses, and there were 25 pigs. Arable farming seems dominated by barley, but included wheat, oats and peas. Of the value of his goods at the end of September, sheep provided 53 per cent, and grain 20 per cent.

This mixed farming of the chalklands was fully described in the report on Wiltshire farming at the end of the 18th century by Thomas Davis, steward of the Longleat estate and himself a tenant of Kingston Deverill.³⁰ It was an economy which intertwined the open fields on the relatively level valley bottom with the thin pastures of the scarp

²³ WSA, 212B/3612.###3611 [check].

²⁴ WSA, 130/22.

²⁵ Longleat House, NMR 7997.

²⁶ WSA, 192/32/ix.

²⁷ Longleat House, Wiltshire/Map39,

²⁸ WSA, EA/17(Kingston Deverill).

²⁹ J. Bettey (ed.), *Wiltshire farming in the seventeenth century*, WRS 57 (2005), 111–2

³⁰ T. Davis, *General view of the agriculture of Wiltshire* (London, 1794); Longleat House, Wiltshire/Map39.

slopes and open downland. The latter maintained the sheep flocks whose manure helped maintain the fertility of the arable fields, especially of barley crops. For Davis the principal purpose of keeping the sheep, was the dung of the sheepfold and its impact on crop yields. The enclosure award of 1785 ended the open fields, but the downland remained a crucial part of the rural economy with its extensive grazing for sheep and thus the source of their manure. Another long-term use of some of the poorer chalkland downland here as elsewhere was in the rearing of rabbits³¹ Such early rabbit rearing is seen in a pillow mound, located³² Rabbits continued to be a valued product of the downland, long after enclosure. In later 19th century annual production of...³³ They remained a valuable part of the economy into the 20th century. In one year in the early part of the century, 3,000 rabbits were sent to Smithfield in London.³⁴

Arable continued as the dominant element in the rural economy after inclosure in the early 19th century but the latter part of the century was to see dramatic rural change, as arable farming, on which the local economy had been so dependent, suffered from the influx of cheaper foreign grain. The rent of the glebe farm fell considerably. But this was also a time of new opportunities, the railways opening up new possibilities of transferring perishable goods and importing stock, coal, machinery and chemical fertiliser, and grain for feeding the livestock. Nearby Warminster achieved a railway connection to Westbury and beyond in 1851, and to Salisbury and thus to London in

³¹ Hare, *Prospering Society*, 72–4; J. Bettey, 'The production of rabbits in Wiltshire during the seventeenth century', *Antiq. Jnl* 84 (2004), 380–93.

³² Wiltshire Archaeological Service, HER, ST83NW702 a mound, possibly a pillow mound (accessed 25 Apr. 2019).

³³ WSA 2865/5: B. Aldridge, 'A consideration of the role of the English farmer in the period 1865–1895 with particular reference to William Stratton of Kingston Deverill, Wiltshire' (unpubl. XXX dissertation, 1980).

³⁴ R. Stratton, 'Farming in the upper Deverills', in J. Wiltshire, *Kingston Deverill: a south west Wiltshire village* (Warminster, 2016), 132.

1856.³⁵ Something of the reaction to these falling grain prices can be seen in the farming activities of the Stratton family, who dominated and still dominate the farming activities of the village. William Stratton took out a lease of the main manor from Lord Weymouth in 1865, subsequently adding the leases of the Glebe farm and Pope's farm from the same lord. His predecessor had continued the traditional sheep corn husbandry of the area, with 1,306 improved Hampshire Down sheep, lambs and six rams. Stratton responded dynamically to the depression in arable farming.

Coming from a background of the dairying north of the county and with a father's reputation in cattle breeding, he shifted the emphasis of the farm to dairying and fattening. Downland was further carved up and fenced off, allowing further cropping and cultivated improved grazing. Steam powered machinery was introduced, such as the steam plough and the threshing and reaping machines. He imported foodstuffs for the livestock and shifted to a greater emphasis on pastoral farming, for which his training in the pastoral farming of north Wiltshire suited him. Among his first tasks had been the setting up of a dairy, initially with a dairy herd of 50 cows. Milk production was dramatically increased which together with its product of butter and cheese could now be easily transferred by rail. Cheese sales generated a net revenue of £554 in 1868–9 which rose to £764 in 1870–1. Pigs were fattened on the whey, and sheep were brought from outside for fattening. In 1882 he brought 1,800 sheep from Scotland via Trowbridge and Warminster.³⁶ He was well of the value of natural manure whether from the sheep or the regular use of the manure cart, but yields were now boosted by the use of chemical fertilisers.³⁷

³⁵ *VCH Wilts*, IV, 283–4.

³⁶ R. Stratton, 'Farming in the upper Deverills', 131–2.

³⁷ Paragraph on William Stratton based on WSA 2865/5, Aldridge, 'A consideration of the role of the English farmer'.

These shifts in agricultural production naturally led to changes in the work force. The population of the village had declined from a peak of 405 in 1841 to 176 in 1911, but the decline in agricultural labourers was even sharper from 85 in 1861 (22.8 per cent of the population) to 13 in 1911 (7.4 per cent). The extent of the decline will have been exaggerated by the issues of nomenclature and by some now being classed as carter, dairymen, or cattlemen but the trend was clear.³⁸ The growth of specialist cattle and dairying staff also reflected the changing agrarian economy.

The interwar years were to be a time of severe financial difficulties which saw a continuation of late 19th century trends of falling grain prices made worse by the repeal in 1922 of the war time protection of grain prices through the Corn Production act of 1917. As William's grandson commented 'each day in my childhood I expected my father to announce that we were bankrupt'.³⁹ But this time of difficulties, provided the family with the opportunities to buy what had been a tenancy in 1921. The period saw a continuation of the earlier shift from arable to pasture. Of the 28,000 a. a third had traditionally been kept as arable, but this had shrunk to about 400 by 1937. Milk production was drastically increased with two hoser milking bails installed since 1920s, one permanent and one mobile, in which four men could now milk 120 cows. In addition, 30 cows were hand milked in the dairy. Cattle rearing and fattening were increasingly important using both local production and Irish heifers. Altogether, by 1937, the farm maintained about 500 cattle whether for milk or meat. At its peak in the summer the farm supported 2000 sheep, whether for breeding or fattening. There was also a pig unit of six breeding sows. The livestock were fed on the natural grassland and rough grazing, the limited supplies of hay, and by sown crops clover, leys, roots

³⁸ Figures calculated from Wiltshire, *Kingston Deverill*, 180–208.

³⁹ Stratton, 'Farming in the upper Deverills', 132

and kale with supplementary cake## and cattle food. Wheat, oats and barley were also grown. Yields were enhanced by imported natural fertiliser of nitrate of soda.⁴⁰

The war years saw the farmer of Manor Farm and Marvins, Richard Stratton, become chairman of the Wiltshire War Agricultural Committee.⁴¹ In 1943 we are provided with a snapshot of his agriculture. Of his 2,800 a., 900 were kept for arable including 280 for wheat. 1,000 a. of downland had been given over to the military for tank training.⁴² The cattle business was evidently remained a key part of the economy, with 450 dairy cows and 350 other cattle, a substantial increase compared with the 500 cattle in 1937. The fattening of externally bred sheep seems to have become less important with a breeding flock of now 280 ewes.⁴³

The decades after the Second World War saw continued arable farming. Continued large chemical inputs led by the 1970s to an increased wheat monoculture based on new varieties of wheat and increased agrochemical inputs, with many fences removed as the prairie landscape developed.⁴⁴

The last three decades have seen continued change at Manor farm, the largest farm in the village. Livestock continued to remain important and to grow. Increased mechanisation allowed greater herds to be maintained. Later, falling milk prices led in 2005 to a dramatic cut in cattle numbers. Such reductions were balanced by increased sheep numbers. By 2016 there were 1,200 ewes, producing between 1,800 and 2,000 lambs per year. Arable farming has increased in scale with changes in

⁴⁰ This section based on Stratton, 'Farming in the upper Deverills', 132–6; *Farmer's Weekly*, 13 Aug. 1937, 28–9.

⁴¹ J. Martin, 'George Odlum, The Ministry of Agriculture and 'Farmer Hudson'', *Agric. Hist. .Rev.* 55, (2007), 234.

⁴² Below, Social Hist.

⁴³ TNA MAF 32/39/303.

⁴⁴ Stratton, 'Farming in the upper Deverills', 137–8.

cropping, the rise and fall of maize silage and more recently the growth of break crops of linseed and oilseed. There has also been a growing use of elaborate machinery.⁴⁵

Trade and Industry

A *market* was founded by the abbey of Netley on their estate at Kingston Deverill in 1382.⁴⁶ It is not clear how far that this was successful, but the accounts show something of the abbey's wider links in the 15th century. When the accounts specify where the Netley sheep were sold it was in the nearby market of Hindon and Heytesbury.⁴⁷ Moreover, its economic trading area was still wider. For building works the manor needed material and labour from further away. The construction of the new barn in 1408–9 required timber from close by at Bittele and Knoyle, stone from nearby at Penne and Fonthill, stone slates from Upton, and sand from Maiden Bradley. But there was also coal from the Mendips for making lime, labour from the small towns of Somerset, Norton St Philip, Bruton and Wells and other places for carpenters, masons, roofers and other tasks.⁴⁸ The community was largely based on agriculture, but an incomplete list of occupations in 1379, shows at least one weaver and a spinner, a reminder of the booming cloth industry of the Wylve valley and of the importance of centres like Mere and Warminster at this time.⁴⁹

Nevertheless, the village has remained essentially an agricultural one until the 20th century. The 19th century census records reflect this. Occasionally they point to industrial work with silk workers or weavers reflecting the presence of a factory in

⁴⁵ D. Stratton, 'Manor Farm Kingston Deverill', 1982–2016', in Wiltshire, *Kingston Deverill*, 139–43.

⁴⁶ *Cal. Close*, 1381–5, 58; 'Market Privileges 1381–1385', *Borough Market Privileges: The hinterland of medieval London, c.1400*, (2006) <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=51628&startpage=3&strquery=deverell>, (accessed 21 May 2013).

⁴⁷ E.g. WSA/192/32/x, xiii, xiv, xv.

⁴⁸ WSA/192/32/vii.

⁴⁹ TNA, E 179/239/193/2; see also Hare, *A prospering Society*, 177–84.

Crockerton (Longbridge Deverill) in 1851 (6), 1861 (17) 1871 (13).⁵⁰ But the vast bulk of the village population in the 19th century was either engaged in agriculture or serviced the agricultural sector.

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⁵⁰ Census figures taken from Wiltshire, *Kingston Deverill*, 185, 189, 191.