

The

Manmade Landscape:

The Impact of Enclosure

in the Wantage Area

of Old Berkshire

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Chapter 1

Enclosure and the Landscape

Parliamentary enclosure was one of the most significant events of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in any parish in which it occurred. It had an impact on all aspects of the community. It affected the economy. The cost of enclosure was sufficiently great to tie up capital for years, but at the same time, it was carried out in the expectation of increased productivity and profits through improved and more efficient husbandry. It altered the social balance of the community. The old communally centred society gave way to one based firmly on individual rights. Anyone too land-poor to benefit from the new order was marginalized. Parliamentary enclosure was, by definition, a political event because it required an act of Parliament to carry out. The process of securing an act might be accompanied by diverse debates within the village, by petitioning and counter-

petitioning Parliament. Whilst in earlier centuries enclosure had been forbidden by legislation because of its social and economic consequences, by the eighteenth century it was actively encouraged, and in the beginning of the nineteenth century a number of general enclosure acts were passed to facilitate the process. Finally, enclosure transformed the rural landscape. The traditional landscape of unimproved commons and wastes grazed by the village livestock and the open, unhedged arable fields and meadow disappeared. In its place was a planned landscape with a patchwork pattern of regular rectangular fields growing a greater variety of crops and separated by stock-proof hawthorn hedges. Crossing the parish was a new more rational network of straight roads with wide verges. This enclosure landscape has come to be seen as traditionally and quintessentially



Figure 1.1 The quintessential landscape created by parliamentary enclosure consisted of an isolated farmstead and buildings surrounded by uniform straight edged rectangular fields stretching as far as the eye could see. Each field was bounded by narrow, stock-proof hawthorn hedges. Approaching the farm and connecting it to the village and beyond were straight roads with wide verges and hedges and ditches on each side. Scattered around the landscape were small areas of woodland that provided shelter for game. This view taken looking north towards Wantage from Court Hill Road come close to that description. At its lower end the track appears to follow the boundary of an older field with the gentle reversed S-shape curve of the old plough line.

English (see fig. 1.1). Today with modern farming techniques and the spread of urban areas into the countryside, there is growing concern

Enclosure was the complex process by which the communal rights and restrictions over the land were abolished, the land divided into individual holdings and thereafter held 'in severalty'. The land was often fenced, hedged, or ditched, but this was not essential. Before enclosure the land was organised in several ways. Whether in arable or pasture the land could be open, that is unfenced; it could be common, subject to common and communal control; or it could be both open and common.¹ Typically where both open and common the arable and meadow were divided into many narrow strips of land with the holding of each proprietor distributed haphazardly across the whole of the parish. For part or all of the year a field or meadowland became communal and the livestock of the manor was pastured on it. The husbandry of the village was under the control of the manor court and regulated by a set of agreed byelaws. Enclosure, however achieved, ended this system. There were a number of different ways to enclose. At its simplest, a person could fence one of his strips or encroach on the common or waste. After a period of time, generally twenty years, the common rights were held to be extinguished. Parliamentary enclosure was at the other end of the scale. Acts often dealt with extensive areas of a parish. It also required an act of Parliament. The enclosure of Ardington and Ardington Meadow, for example enclosed almost 1337 acres. Almost two-thirds of the parish was enclosed by this one act.² Between the two extremes were an array of methods to bring about the same end including formal and informal agreements and the abolition of communal rights through the consolidation of a manor into a single holding.

Although the landscape and the organisation and management of farming changed at the time of enclosure, the fundamentals of husbandry did not. Whether his land was still in the open fields or was enclosed, one basic principle remained constant for the farmer, or to use a more traditional term, the 'husbandman'. Whenever anything was taken off the farm – either as food for the family (unless they returned nutrients through night soil) or as goods to be sold off the farm – the husbandman was robbing the soil of its organic matter (humus) and nutrients so faced loss of fertility on the farm. There was a constant effort to minimise this loss. A number

of strategies were used keep the land 'in good heart' by returning the nitrogen, phosphate, potassium, and other trace nutrients and organic matter used by the crops to the soil through animal dung. Hence, all 'traditional husbandry' was of necessity mixed farming and involved the close integration of livestock and crop. The arable land grew crops to produce food, fibre, and sometimes fuel, and the animals produced meat, dairy products, wool, hides, and tallow. Equally important, they produced manure without which the soil of the arable land would eventually become exhausted. This recycled most of the nutrients removed by the growing crops. Because the livestock improved the quality of the nutrients in the manure, it could actually increase the food available to the plants on the farm. Thus, ideally, the farm was worked in a self-sustaining cycle of arable and livestock production.

The husbandman was fully aware of the importance of keeping the soil in good heart. Many of the daily and seasonal activities were aimed at maintaining this cycle. The most basic technique was the use of the fallow. In much of Berkshire the arable land was organised originally in two fields.³ One was planted with whatever crops were needed by the farmer (or the village) and the other was left unsown or fallow. The husbandman believed that the land, in the same way as his animals, needed periods of rest. The fallow provided this resting and restorative period in the rotation of the crops around the fields. When land was left unplanted for a complete year it was often called a bare fallow. This term is confusing. In reality the land was soon covered with all sorts of plants including weeds as well as stubble from the previous harvest and grain plants growing from seeds missed by harvesters and gleaners. Some of the livestock was kept on the common and waste, but many animals, especially sheep, were put onto the fallow to eat the weeds, grain and stubble. At the same time they fertilised the land ready for the next crop of grain. It was discovered that rather than leaving all the fallow land without a crop, no fertility was lost if part of it was used to grow feed for the livestock. This could be something like beans, peas, or vetches, or even turnips or a grass and clover mixture. In Berkshire planting the fallow was known as hitching. Hitching the fallow had three main advantages. First it provided superior feed for the livestock that then produced better

¹ Chapman and Seeliger, 2002, 10

² 48 Geo. III c.74 1808; BRO D/EL/01/1

³ Tate, 1943, 61

quality manure. Secondly many of the crops – beans, peas, vetches, and clovers - were able to take nitrogen (an essential plant nutrient) out of the atmosphere and ‘fix’ it in the soil. These plants actually added new nutrients to the cycle. The chemistry behind ‘nitrogen-fixing’ was not known until the end of the nineteenth century, but many had observed that these plants increased the yield of the following crops. A third advantage was that a sown crop on the fallow reduced weed growth and at the same time provided better ground cover. Fewer nutrients were leached out of the topsoil. Once tried, it was seen that the advantages of growing animal feed rather than leaving the growth on the fallow to chance were sufficiently great to repay the extra effort involved in hitching the fallow.

This led to a second technique for maintaining and improving soil fertility. The two fields could be divided into three, four, or even more and the crop rotation extended. Less of the land would be left in fallow each year. Sometimes the third field was used to grow a corn crop two years in three. Although the grain of the corn crop – wheat, barley, oats, or rye – was often taken out of the nutrient cycle on the farm, much of the plant including the straw and the haulm, was left for livestock bedding and feed and so returned to the land. Reasonably fertile soils could withstand this more intensive use. Often one or more years in the rotation were dedicated for the growth of animal feed. One of the most important innovations in agriculture in the eighteenth century was the evolution of the Norfolk four-course rotation. Here the land was divided into four fields. In the first year wheat, an exhausting crop, was grown. In the second year turnips were planted instead of a bare fallow to provide animal feed. During this year the land was manured while the animals fed on the turnips. Sometimes sheep especially were fed, or folded, in the field and sometimes the turnips were lifted and carted to stall-fed animals. While the crop was growing it was possible to hoe it to remove weeds. In the third year a spring corn, often barley or oats, were planted. Again these were understood to be exhausting crops. In the final year of the rotation the field was planted with a mixture of grasses and clovers. These temporary grasses, known as a ley, could be mown for hay, grazed, or both. This year in the rotation was again a restorative period planted in place of a fallow. Often the growing period, and thus both the provision of feed and the nitrogen-fixing capacity of the crop, was increased by using a technique known as undersowing. Soon after the barley or oats were planted in the third year

of the rotation the same field was sown with grass and clover. While the spring corn was growing the ley also grew. At harvest the land was left with a mature growth of grasses mixed into the corn stubble to grow on into the fourth year so avoiding the need to plough the land after the barley crop and sow the ley. The Norfolk four-course rotation was in reality two cycles of the rotation used on the two fields – i.e. corn, hitched fallow, corn, hitched fallow. It maintained or even improved soil fertility at the same time as it increased the output of corn and even animals from the farm. It was also extremely flexible. On poorer soils the arable could be divided into five or more fields and the land could be rested longer by leaving the grass ley to grow for more years. Because it necessitated the division of the arable into at least four fields, the Norfolk four-course rotation was often felt too complex for unenclosed villages. The improvement it made to both arable and livestock productivity was often sufficient incentive for enclosure.

The enormity of the task facing those who chose to enclose large areas of a manor or parish through act of Parliament is hard to imagine. It was expensive, with the average cost of enclosures up to 1801 averaging slightly more than £1650.⁴ Enclosure involved years of disruption. At Englefield in Berkshire the enclosure act was passed in 1809 but the award was not made until 1829. It was a gamble. The location, size, and quality of the new holding were unknown in advance and the outcome was essentially out of the control of the owner or farmer. The better farmer who had worked hard to improve the fertility of his land in the open fields faced the prospect of exchanging this improved land for land less well farmed.⁵ According to William Mavor, the author of a report on the agriculture of Berkshire commissioned by the Board of Agriculture in 1809:

No real improvements can possibly take place, where the owner or occupier of the land is obliged to depend on the caprice of others, and where the awkwardness of ill nature of one bad neighbour may defeat the best intentions of a whole parish.⁶

⁴ Young, 1808, 98; The passing of the 1801 General Inclosure Act was expected to reduce this by creating a template on which future acts could be based. However, it is uncertain that the act had much impact on cost of enclosure.

⁵ Caird, 11

⁶ Mavor, 137

Once enclosed the farmer or the landowner had to ring fence his holding, had to partition it into manageable fields, had to make, for the first time, all decisions about what was to be grown and where, and had to manage his own farming calendar. A holding was no longer spread around all the arable fields to minimise risk of crop failure.⁷ The owner generally had to negotiate new leases. He had to increase his vigilance in order to ensure that farms were not abused nor the soil exhausted. The new freedom over their own husbandry made it far more possible for farmers to over crop and under manure. So, why enclose? Why change a system that had survived for generations? The answer is complex. It was believed to make farming more efficient.⁸ Gone was the time spent moving from one isolated strip to another in the large parish fields. Gone was the need to clear a crop off a field so it could be opened for common grazing. Gone were the problems of breeding and rearing animals as part of a common flock or herd. Decisions about cropping and the farming calendar could be made to suit the weather, the nature of an individual field, or even marketing conditions, and the farmers were free to adopt or devise new rotations. With greater efficiency went increased profitability. The landowner could expect higher rents from enclosed land.⁹ He could introduce new terms and conditions in the renegotiated leases. Enclosure provided a chance to make major changes to a farming system. On heavy land this might be a decision to grass the holding and specialise in livestock production. On the light soils, such as the downs, sheep walk could be turned into arable and farmed using clovers and roots. Whether it met these expectations was debated by contemporaries and is still an understudied topic for historians.

Parliamentary enclosure in England

The use of acts of parliament to bring about enclosure occurred throughout England. Between the first enclosure act for Radipole, Dorset, in 1604 and the final act for land at Elmstone Hardwick, Gloucestershire, in 1914, 6.8 million acres, 20.9 per cent of all land in

England, were enclosed using 5265 acts.¹⁰ This figure masks the variation in importance of this form of enclosure in the country. In Oxfordshire 54.3 per cent of the county was enclosed by act of Parliament, while in Kent as little as 0.8 per cent was affected.¹¹ Spatially the movement was most pervasive in Oxfordshire, Cambridgeshire, the Midlands, Lincolnshire, and parts of Yorkshire and least significant along the Welsh border, in Devon and Cornwall and along the southeastern coast.¹² Chronologically most parliamentary enclosures fell into two periods, the fifteen years between 1765 and 1780 and during the years of the French Revolution and Napoleonic Wars between 1793 and 1815.¹³

Enclosure during the 1760s and 1770s mainly dealt with the open-field arable in an area extending from Warwickshire to the East Riding of Yorkshire. On the heavy clay soils of the Midlands there was a persistent shortage of grass for livestock grazing. The little common and waste that still existed was overgrazed and of poor quality. At Wigston Magna in the midland county of Leicestershire the three open fields each contained between 800 and 900 acres. There was also a small area of meadow but very little pasture or waste.¹⁴ In the 1720s, in the village of Grafton, Northamptonshire, again in the Midlands, there were 265 acres of open-field, but only three parcels of unenclosed meadow containing 12 acres and 46 acres of common. Almost a quarter of the arable was planted to both temporary and permanent grass.¹⁵ This was an expedient method of increasing the provision of livestock feed where pasture was in short supply. Many parishes encouraged or sometimes even required that land on the arable be planted in grass. In Arnesby, Leicestershire, c. 1550, 58 per cent of the arable land was in normal rotational crops and 42 per cent in grass. On seven farms at Lutterworth, again in Leicestershire, in 1607, four per cent of the area was enclosed, fifteen per cent used for pasture and 81 per cent used as arable of which thirteen per cent was planted to grass leys.¹⁶ This was in an area that once enclosed was converted almost exclusively to pasture. Even when parts of the arable were planted to grass, the pressure on land for livestock was so great that the number of animals allowed on the common and waste had to be reduced. The

⁷ McCloskey, 1972, 19

⁸ Norden, 99; Mavor, 137 & 492; Chapman & Seeliger, 2002, 19-20; Allen, 1982, 937-53 (argues against a rise in efficiency at enclosure but instead found that the open fields were equally efficient)

⁹ Turner, Beckett, Afton, 201-2; Chambers and Mingay, 1966, 8; Tate, 1967, 154

¹⁰ Turner 1980, 32, 221

¹¹ Turner 1980, 180-1

¹² Turner 1980, 35

¹³ Turner 1980, 66

¹⁴ Hoskins, 1957b, 94-5

¹⁵ Northampton Record Office G 3883

¹⁶ Hoskins, 1950, 140-1

sheep stint or number of animals allowed on the common at Countesthorpe, Leicestershire was reduced by 50 per cent in 1720. Again in Leicestershire at Castle Donnington in 1737, grazing was so short that it was 'eaten in early summer' with the result that the livestock starved. The parish was forced to reduce the number of animals (the stint) on the cow pasture by 25 per cent and on the sheep common by 50 per cent. In 1772 at Billington in the county of Bedfordshire it was found that '...the Commons and Commonable Fields and places belonging to the hamlet of Billington aforesaid have been overcharged and burdened with too many cattle to their great injury and prejudice...' Again, the stint was reduced.¹⁷ The shortage of pasture encouraged landowners to seek enclosure of the arable land so that it could be converted to grassland.¹⁸ The heavy clay soil was better suited to pasture. Work on the arable was both difficult and damaging when the soil was wet. Conversion to livestock husbandry made both economic and technical sense, but this was only practical on land enclosed and held in severalty. Before 1793, 1611 acts resulted in the enclosure of 2,563,660 acres or 37.7 per cent of parliamentary enclosures in England. Of these 72 per cent included arable land and 28 per cent involved only waste and commons.¹⁹

The second main phase of parliamentary enclosure, affecting both arable and waste including large areas of downs and fenland, occurred between 1793 and 1815. In these years 1969 enclosure acts were granted to enclose 2,892,137 acres or 42.5 per cent of all English parliamentary enclosures. Of this 69 per cent included open field arable and 31 per cent common and waste.²⁰ This period coincided with concerns over the rapid population growth, shortages of grain caused by the wars against France, and years of particularly poor harvests in the 1790s.²¹ The wars and harvest failure coming together sent a wave of panic through the nation. By increasing grain, and particularly wheat, production, farmers could patriotically play their part in the war effort. At the same time they stood to make large profits. The highly inflated price of grain during the French wars could be expected to help defray the cost of enclosure. Once enclosure was complete, the farmer could grow more corn through the

introduction of a Norfolk type rotation. Landowners wanted to take advantage of enclosure, particularly during the high wheat prices of the early nineteenth century. Because enclosed land could be more efficiently and profitably managed than the intermixed strips of the open fields, a higher rent could generally be demanded. The benefits of enclosure during the wars against France were believed to outweigh the cost and inconvenience. It was possible, though more difficult, to introduce the new rotations in the open field system simply by reducing the area in fallow or adding more fields to the rotation. At Chaddleworth in Berkshire in 1737/8, the two common fields were divided into five.²² Again in Berkshire at Watchfield in 1749 the two common fields were divided into four and sainfoin along with other grasses was to be planted.²³ A more complex division of the fields took place at Shenington in Oxfordshire. According to the 1732 Customs of the parish:

Shenington Field is called Townside Land, Farmside Lands, and Cotmanside Land. The Townside is divided into four Parts, and three of them are ploughed and sow'd every year, with wheat, Pease and Barley; the fourth part lies fallow; or when it is Sow'd with Pease, it is called Hitch. Part of Townside is every other Years Ground. Farmside is ploughed as the Townside. The Cotmanside being divided into four parts, one is sow'd with wheat, and one with Barley every year; sometimes the other two parts lie fallow, and sometimes both are hitch, or as the parish agree.²⁴

This system not only illustrates a complex division of the open fields, it also the practice of hitching. Hitching agreements in which part of a fallow was planted to beans, peas, vetches, grass and clover, or more rarely turnips, were a long established part of some open field agricultural systems in Berkshire and, by other names, elsewhere. On the chalks of Hampshire, wheat was often followed by spring corn, which was undersown with a clover/grass seed mix and then left for two years in place of a fallow. At Micheldever, in Hampshire turnips, peas, clover, and vetches were grown on the fallow of the common fields by 1755.²⁵ In Berkshire at Englefield a nine-year agreement of 1762 provided for the wheat stubble to be planted with turnips.²⁶ At Buckland a hitching agreement for

¹⁷ Leicestershire Record Office DE66/4350, DG8/24; Bedfordshire Record Office BO 1326

¹⁸ Turner, 1980,143; Hoskins, 1957, 238-40, Thirsk, 1954, 224

¹⁹ Turner 1980, 71

²⁰ Turner 1980 71, 79

²¹ Turner 1980, 63-93

²² BRO D/EW E9

²³ BRO D/EPb E52/1 and E53

²⁴ Havinden, 1961,79

²⁵ Hampshire Record Office 4M53/107/1; 5M50/2323; 149M89/R4/6039

²⁶ BRO D/EBy E70

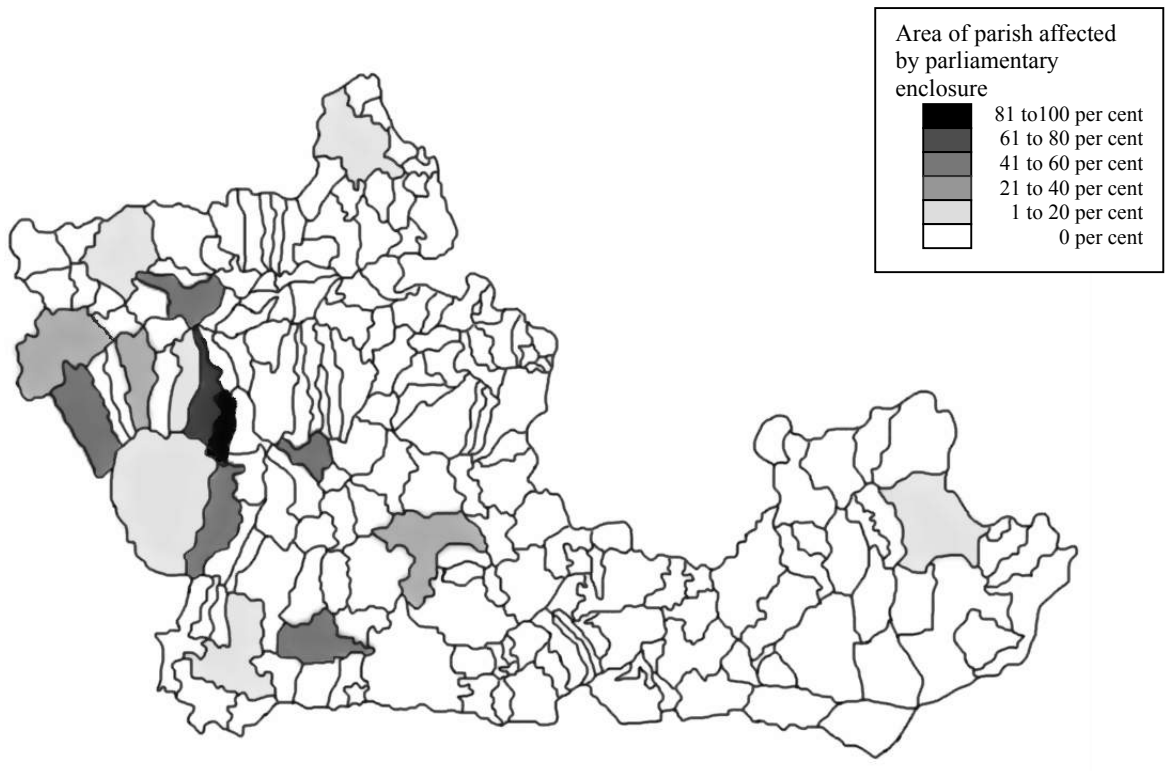


Fig. 1.2a Proportion of Berkshire parishes affected by parliamentary enclosure before 1793

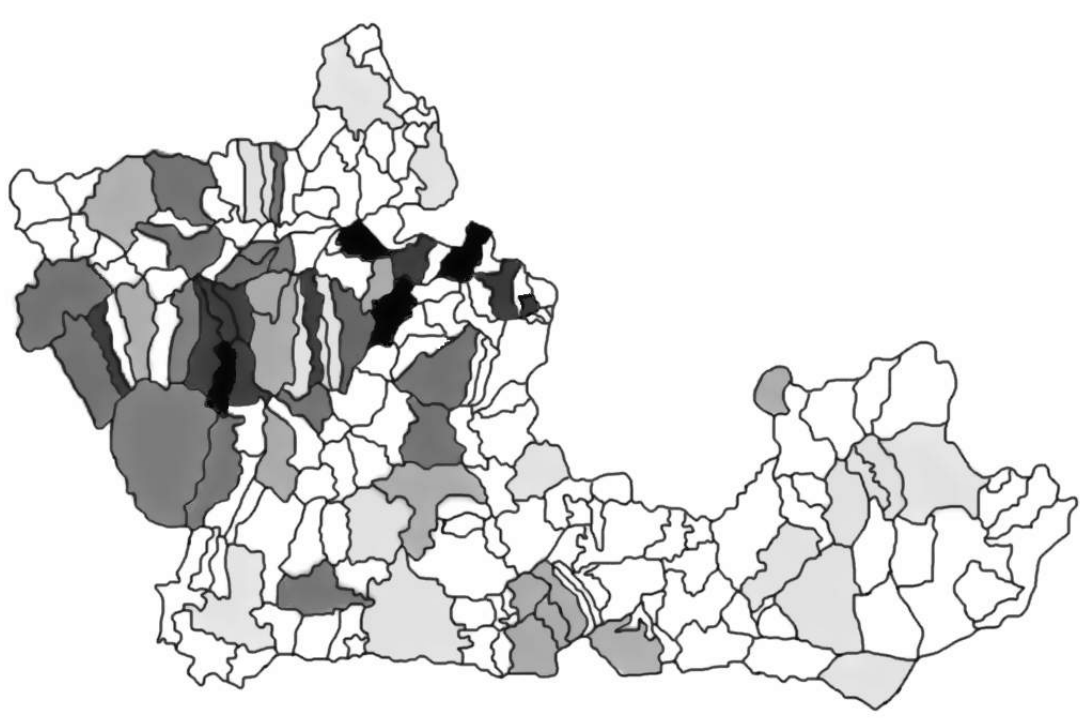


Fig. 1.2b Proportion of Berkshire parishes affected by parliamentary enclosure before 1816

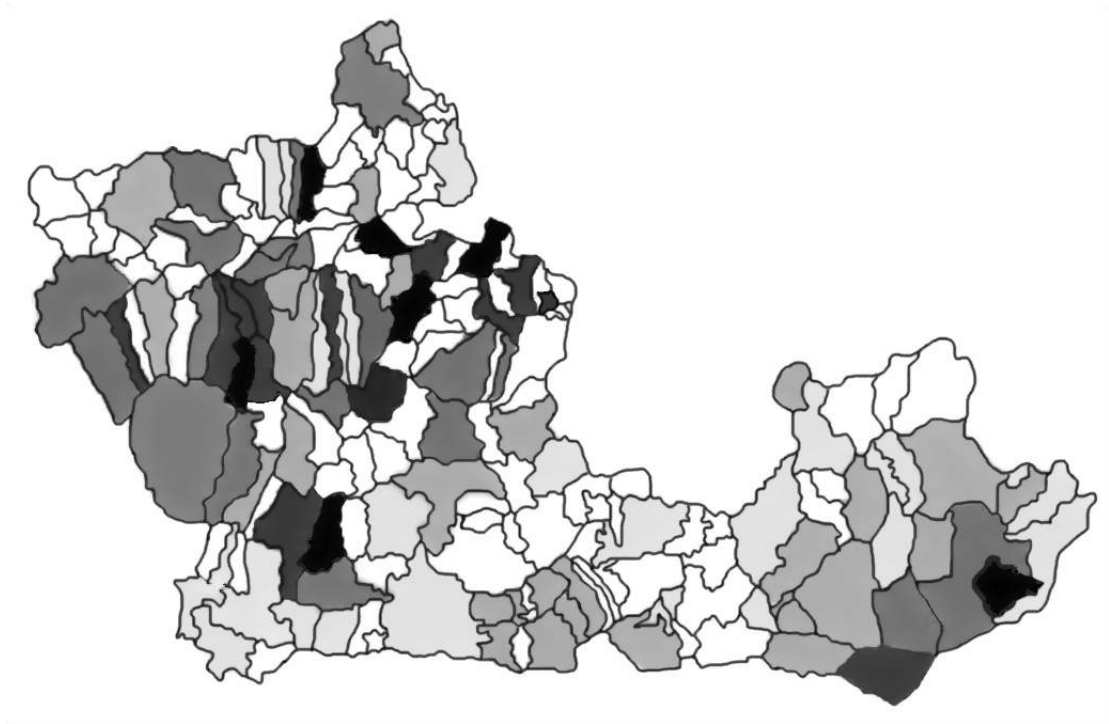


Fig. 1.2c Proportion of Berkshire parishes affected by parliamentary enclosure before 1830

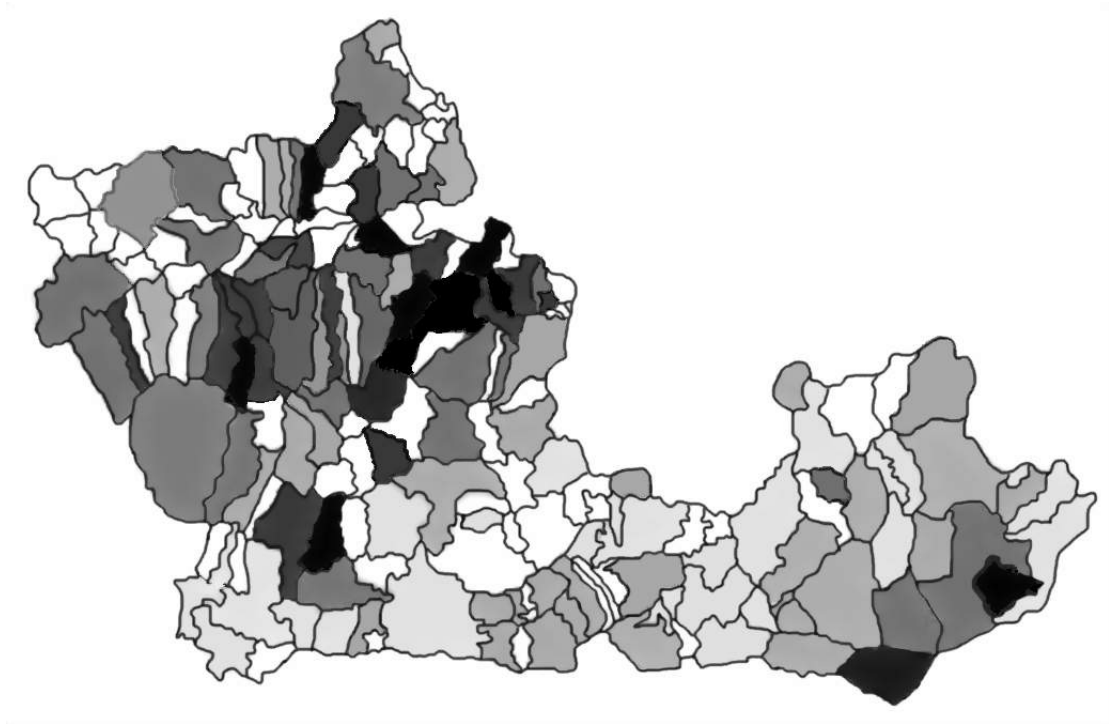


Fig. 1.2d Proportion of Berkshire parishes affected by parliamentary enclosure before 1885

1724 agreed to plant the fallow with peas 'for the better maintenance of cattle and sheep.' Vetches and other pulses were also grown in the hitched land in the parish.²⁷ However, even though such measures increased the potential of the open field, farmers lacked the flexibility of land held in severalty. As long as farming decisions were made by the whole community, the individual did not have the option to suit his cropping to the varied conditions on the holding or in the marketplace. The solution was to enclose the land and farm in severalty.

Parliamentary enclosure in the old county of Berkshire

Characteristically the enclosure pattern in the pre-1974 county of Berkshire fits between that in the Midlands, where parliamentary enclosure was the dominant form of enclosure, was largely completed in the years between 1765 and 1780, and mostly affected the arable open fields, and that in the south of England where other forms of enclosure were more widely used and where more waste and common land remained to be enclosed between 1793 and 1815 by act of Parliament. The enclosure pattern for the county is an interesting combination of the two regions in a number of ways. Like the southern counties, the main wave of enclosures took place during the wars with France at the beginning of the nineteenth century. The maps in figs. 1.2.a-d show the temporal spread of parliamentary enclosure activity in the county at the end of each major phase of activity identified by Turner. During the 1793-1815 period over half, 57.4 per cent, of the area in Berkshire affected by act of Parliament was enclosed. Another 21.4 per cent was enclosed between the first act in the county for Sunningwell in 1723 (no award has yet been found for this enclosure) and 1793, 5.7 per cent between 1816 and 1829, and the final 15.5 per cent was enclosed between 1830 and the award for Steventon in 1885.²⁸

In the proportion of the county enclosed by act of Parliament, the Berkshire enclosure pattern fits more closely to the enclosure pattern found in the Midlands. In the south non-parliamentary enclosure was generally used to end communal husbandry. In Hampshire to the south of Berkshire just 16.8 per cent of the land was enclosed by the authority of Parliament.

The county was the twenty-fourth out of forty-three counties in terms of the density of enclosure through act of Parliament. Oxfordshire to the north was ranked first with 54.3 per cent.²⁹ The density for Berkshire was calculated by Tate and Turner at 34.1 per cent of the surface area. This, however, has recently been revised by Wordie to 34.9 per cent. Wordie's calculation makes Berkshire with the neighbouring county of Buckinghamshire joint twelfth most densely enclosed county.³⁰ The maps at figs. 1.2.a-d also demonstrate the density of parliamentary enclosure in each period. The northwestern area of the county where it borders Oxfordshire was, as would be expected, the most densely enclosed. To the east of the county are the Crown estate including the Windsor Forest. The 1813 enclosure of the Forest involved land in fifteen parishes and was the largest single award in the county. The Crown was awarded 6665 acres and another 11,812 acres of non-crown land was awarded in thirteen of the fifteen parishes.³¹ This massive award was largely responsible for the relatively high density of enclosure in the area. The south of the county, where it borders onto Hampshire, was least affected by parliamentary enclosure. There were also thirty-three parishes in which no parliamentary enclosures occurred but instead enclosure was non-parliamentary. In another two parishes Parliament was asked to confirm an already existing agreement and no other area within the parish was affected by parliamentary enclosure. Some 4.2 per cent of the county, including Greenham Common, one of the best-known commons in the country, remained open after 1885.³²

While many areas enclosed by act contained both arable and waste, some enclosure acts dealt only with the enclosure of wastes and commons and not the arable open-fields. Such acts were often used to end common rights on downland sheepwalks so were more often found on the chalks of the southern counties of England. In Hampshire, although enclosure including some arable dominated, 49 per cent of parliamentary enclosures that occurred during between 1793 and 1815 involved only waste and common. In Oxfordshire, on the other hand, approximately a third of parliamentary enclosures occurred during the war period. Of these less than six per cent only involved waste and common.³³ In the Midlands where little common or waste

²⁷ BRO D/EWe E2

²⁸ Turner, 1980, 194

²⁹ Turner 1980, 180-1

³⁰ Wordie xxv

³¹ Wordie, xxiii-xxiv

³² Wordie, xxix

³³ Turner, 1980 81

Table 1.1 Parliamentary Enclosure in the Wantage area

Parish, Tithing, Township, Chapelry	Date of act	Date of award	Area in parish ¹ (acres)	Area affected (acres)	Per cent enclosed by act
Letcombe Regis with East Challow	1801	1804	3812	2434	64
West Challow (in Letcombe Regis)	1801	1804	739	31	4
	1802	1803		395	53
Wantage with Grove	1803	1806	4294 ²	2370	55
Ardington	1808	1811	1820	1143	63
West Lockinge (in Wantage)	1808	1811	867	31	4
East Lockinge	1808	1811	3742	55	3
	1845	1853		947	25
Charlton (in Wantage)	1860 ³	1868	1884	1267	67
Total			17,158	8673	51

Notes: 1. Based on Wordie (2000)

2. This does not include the hamlets of West Lockinge and Charlton

3. Date of Order under General Act of 1845

Sources: Enclosure awards

remained to be enclosed, awards invariably included at least some arable. In spite of the areas of downland in the county, the pattern in Berkshire again was more like that found in the Midlands. Of the 161,207 acres calculated by Wordie to have been enclosed by act of Parliament in the county, only 7,253 acres or 4.5 per cent of the enclosed area involved only waste and common.³⁴

Slightly over one-third of the surface area of Berkshire was enclosed by act of Parliament between 1723 and 1885. The acts normally stipulated that one copy of the award was to be deposited with the incumbent and churchwardens in the parish and a second, enrolled copy, with the county records. This has resulted in a vast archive of important, nationally comparable, material. The words of two of the best-known writers on the subject of English parliamentary enclosures, W.E. Tate and M.E. Turner, best summarise the value and scope of the awards and accompanying maps:

The primary purpose of the awards was at once to achieve and to register the change from the ancient methods of husbandry, the use of open field arable land, of common meadow, and of common pasture... to the modern system of land ownership, tenure, and cultivation 'in severalty'. But the awards have much more than merely legal or agricultural interest and importance. They form the best, and in many cases the only, source of accurate information as to the distribution of land ownership in English villages two centuries ago. They are full of useful information as to the types of land tenure prevalent in the different district. In perhaps half the villages of the country they serve as ultimate title-deeds to a great part of

the land, both that belonging to ordinary proprietors, and that allotted to rectors, vicars and lay impropiators in lieu of tithe and glebe. They record the lands forming the endowments of ancient village charities and schools. They are an authority for information as to the course and breadth of the highways, the existence of footpaths, bridle ways, and rights of way, and the courses, breadths and liability for cleansing of most of the surface drains. The awards, and the plans which are generally appended to them, register the ownership of hedges and fences. They distinguish between titheable and non-titheable lands.... They specify the allotments of land for public purposes, generally to the parish Surveyors of Highways for use as parish gravel pits.³⁵

Their value is such that in 2002 the Berkshire Record Office received a grant from the New Opportunities Fund to make the key enclosure documents – the awards and the maps – available to a wider public. This was to be done by scanning the archives and putting them onto a website specifically created for the purpose – www.berkshireenclosure.org. Berkshire is the first county to have made the enclosure awards is hoped that this resource will be widely and profitably used.

Enclosure in the Wantage area

The New Opportunity Fund also made funds available for a nine-month research project on parliamentary enclosure and its impact on the landscape. This was intended to illustrate not only the importance of this aspect of enclosure, but also the types of material available for anyone interested in exploring the enclosure

³⁴ Wordie, xxv

³⁵ Tate and Turner, 1978, 39

history of a Berkshire parish. Four parishes in northwestern Berkshire – Letcombe Regis with the hamlets of West and East Challow, Wantage with Grove, Charlton, and West Lockinge, East Lockinge with Betterton and West Ginge, and Ardington, were chosen to form the basis of a more in-depth study of the impact of enclosure on the landscape.

The area was typical of the county as a whole and even more so of north-western Berkshire. Just over half, 51 per cent, of the area of the four parishes was enclosed by act of parliament. Almost three-fourths of this enclosure took place during the early years of the nineteenth century; the rest was in the period after 1830 (see Table 1.1). The archive that survives to be used for the study is typical of the type of documents that are available for most areas in the county. There is at least one enclosure award and map for each parish. In addition there are a number of good pre-enclosure maps and tithe maps available for the area as well as a range of related archives including enclosure acts, a working map of the enclosure commissioners, commissioners' minutes, abstracts of claimants, and evidence of failed enclosure attempts. This material is supported by estate material – maps, deeds, leases, surveys, terriers, and correspondence – as well as some manor court records. Finally the area contains a variety of elements that help to illustrate the impact of enclosure on the landscape. The parishes are long and narrow, stretching from the Vale of the White Horse southwards up onto the Berkshire Downs. Each therefore has a wide range of soils from heavy clay best suited to grazing in the north, poor light chalks used as sheepwalk in the south, and good loams in the central parts of the area.

blank sheet on which to reshape the landscape for just under half of the area was already enclosed. Chapter Three considers non-parliamentary enclosure. Such enclosures were sometimes very similar in nature and impact to enclosures by act of Parliament. Others affected only small areas, and their impact on the landscape was very different from that created by enclosure through act. Once a decision was made to obtain an act of Parliament to enclose a parish, a team of men – enclosure commissioners – was appointed to carry out the complex process of dividing, allotting, and enclosing the land. They were the architects of the enclosure landscape. Chapter Four considers their work and more generally, the process of enclosure. Chapter Five explores the landscape created by the commissioners. In spite of the growth of urban areas, particularly Wantage and Grove, and the changes that occurred with the creation of an estate village in East Lockinge and Ardington, much of this landscape can still be seen in the Wantage area. Other areas where less radical alteration of the landscape has taken place could undoubtedly provide a richer sample of evidence on the ground. One aim throughout the text is to encourage similar studies in other parishes to further explore the impact of enclosure on the Berkshire landscape.

Enclosure and the Landscape

In order to understand the impact of parliamentary enclosure on the landscape we need to have some knowledge of what was there before. Chapter Two explores the open and common fields of the region before any enclosure took place. Half of the land in the four parishes was still farmed in this way until the early years of the nineteenth century. The large open fields of the arable and the meadow along with the unimproved waste and common created a landscape quite unlike that after enclosure. However, the men appointed to carry out parliamentary enclosure were not given a

Chapter 2

The Landscape before Enclosure

From time out of mind the land in the Wantage area, along with much of the rest of Berkshire, had been worked communally with large common arable fields and livestock grazing on the waste. Visually the landscape would have looked surprisingly modern. The historian W.G. Hoskins, one of the foremost twentieth-century writers on the history of the landscape, noted, 'The open-field landscape must have been one of great beauty, with its long sweeping lines disappearing miles away over the low... horizons.' Hoskins was writing in 1957 before the grubbing up of thousands of miles of hedgerow came to be considered an ecological issue. The more modern eye now mourns the lost pattern of small, hedged fields so typical of many parliamentary enclosures. It is this countryside, rather than the open-field landscape admired by Hoskins, that has come to be seen as traditional and quintessentially English. Enclosure was once as controversial as modern prairie farming is today. On one side were the advocates of modern methods and efficiency. On the other were the traditionalists who could see little value in what were then modern methods.

The Common Field Village



Fig. 2.1 Charlton Village In a common field village the homesteads and closes, were typically located along the main road through the village. In addition to the 'backfields' were other small closes. Like the backfield these could be used for livestock or for crops. They were also often orchards. The village pond, seen along the road on the map, was an essential feature of common field husbandry.

Source: BRO D/EC0 P1

The common field village was different from one farmed in severalty both in the way it functioned and in its landscape. Common field husbandry was not controlled by individuals but instead by the manor court, or, if the manor court was no longer active, by the parish vestry. The court met twice yearly to set down in an agreed set of byelaws and punish transgressors.³⁶ At these meetings, decisions were made about the husbandry in the common fields. The business of the Court Baron at Letcombe Regis and East Challow was typical. Between 1717 and 1740 it prevented overuse of the common by restricting its use to those living in the villages and further enforced this by insisting that all cows were identified with the village mark. It ordered that pigs be ringed so they were physically stopped from eating the land down to bare soil thereby damaging the fields and commons. It determined the date on which the arable and meadow were to be breached or thrown open so that the livestock could be fed off the stubble while manuring the field for the next crop. It also regulated the cropping on the arable, enforced the hitching arrangements to temporary sow crops on part of the fallow, and restricted the cutting of weeds on the arable so that this source of livestock feed would be available when the field was fallowed. The court routinely enforced regulations for clearing ditches, and maintaining the mounds and hedges. Encroachments and enclosures were also brought before the court for judgement and for fines to be imposed.³⁷

The hamlet of Charlton, the earliest documented open field system in the four parishes, was typical of numerous Berkshire common-field villages.³⁸ Although there were a few isolated farms, most of the inhabitants lived in the village with the dwellings clustered along the roads passing through the hamlet (see Fig. 2.1). In the village behind each so-called 'ancient homestead' was a small close or 'backfield' that was probably never worked as common land. These backfields along with other small closes near the village were put to various uses. One of the most important was to pasture livestock, including pigs and poultry and horses. These closes were also used for cattle, and less often sheep, during the winter when they required supplementary feeding and at night throughout the year. The farm accounts of Robert Loder, a large farmer living in the nearby parish of Harwell in the early seventeenth century, are one of the best sources for details of common-field husbandry in northwestern Berkshire.³⁹ Some of his closes were orchards where he grew a variety of apples, cherries, pears, plums, and walnuts. He also grazed the grass growing in the orchard. In addition he grew hops and hemp. Each of these was a high value crop that could not be planted in the common arable fields. Hemp and flax were particularly important in the Wantage area where the flax spinning, sack making, and twine industry ensured a good demand for these alternative crops.⁴⁰ Loder also grew hay in his paddocks to supplement that from his meadowland. These closes could also be used for other arable crops.⁴¹

Around the village were the arable fields. In most of Berkshire there were originally two fields.⁴² In many other parts of the country a three-field system prevailed. It was possible for the proprietors to divide one or more of the fields in the arable in order to increase the flexibility of the farming by creating a longer and more varied crop rotation. In the neighbouring parish of Chaddleworth an agreement signed by all the proprietors in 1737/8 provided for the division of the two fields into five so that a two year grass ley could be introduced into the rotation.⁴³ At Charlton, there were four fields - two large fields, Upper East Field and Upper West Field, to the south of the village and two much smaller fields, Lower East Field and Lower West Field to the north. Originally the manor may have had two fields, the upper and lower. A map dated 1754 shows the four fields, while at the time of the tithe commutation in 1844, the northernmost fields were farmed as one. In order to facilitate the division of the open fields, an act for 'Improving the Cultivation of Common Fields' was passed in 1773.⁴⁴ This act improved flexibility in open-field husbandry by allowing decisions, including the decision to further divide the arable fields, to be taken by three-quarters of the proprietors. By the early nineteenth century when the parliamentary enclosure of the four parishes was undertaken, only Ardington appears to have been worked in a two-field system. Other systems were more complex. At East Challow and Letcombe Regis there were three fields in each system. Charlton had four fields

³⁶ Beckett, 1989, 26-35; Shaw-Taylor, 2002, 63-9

³⁷ BRO D/EF M5

³⁸ A late tenth century charter identifies open fields at Coerlatum (Charlton). Tate, 1943, 60

³⁹ BRO D/ELs A8 (also transcribed with an excellent introduction by G.E. Fussell, 1936)

⁴⁰ Gibbons and Davy, 88

⁴¹ For a general account of the use of high value plants in agriculture see Thirsk, 1997

⁴² Tate, 1943, 61

⁴³ BRO D/EW/E9

⁴⁴ 13 Geo. III c. 81

including. At East Lockinge there appear to have been three fields, although one of them may have been divided into two parts. At Wantage there were four fields. In Grove six fields are mentioned in the award. At West Challow there were seven relatively small fields.

Although enclosure was late, the common field system at Charlton was typical. The extract taken from the 1754 map showing the two upper fields at Charlton shows many fundamental features of common arable fields (see Fig. 2.2). The large fields were divided into furlongs with eight in Upper West Field and five in Upper East Field. The layout of the arable field was very much determined by traditional husbandry techniques with the direction of the strips or lands in the furlong determined by the best and easiest direction for ploughing.⁴⁵ Thus a slight rise or fall in the field might result in a change in the direction of the strips in the furlong. In Charlton, Larks Hill and The Land above the Turnpike were at right angles to most of the other furlongs in the two fields. Within each furlong were the intermixed strips of those with arable land in the township. For the most part the strips in a furlong were parallel to each other, but Town Furlong shows a pragmatic approach to the strips. Headlands were the strips running at right angles to the other lands in the furlong where the plough was turned. These are best illustrated in Upper East Field between Red Lands Stump and the furlong Shooting on Lockinge Field. Once all the strips were ploughed, the headland could be worked. At Harwell, Robert Loder planted some of his headlands to arable but others, called haddes, were planted to grass.⁴⁶ The uniformity of layout of the field was further disrupted by the occasional shortened strips, often at right angles to the rest of the lands in the furlong, known as butts and triangular areas worked by hand in the corners known as gores. The position and shape of Under the Town Furlong suggests that it may have been land taken from the waste between Charlton and Wantage and incorporated into the arable. Originally the arable of each system would



Fig. 2.2 Upper East Field and Upper West Field, two of the four fields in the township of Charlton contain quintessential features of a common field system. Each field is divided into a number of furlongs and these into parallel strips or lands. The direction of the strips was determined by the lie of the land and the best direction for ploughing. The property of each owner is intermixed with others in the field but by 1754 several owners were consolidation their strips.
Source: BRO D/EC0 P1

These are best illustrated in Upper East Field between Red Lands Stump and the furlong Shooting on Lockinge Field. Once all the strips were ploughed, the headland could be worked. At Harwell, Robert Loder planted some of his headlands to arable but others, called haddes, were planted to grass.⁴⁶ The uniformity of layout of the field was further disrupted by the occasional shortened strips, often at right angles to the rest of the lands in the furlong, known as butts and triangular areas worked by hand in the corners known as gores. The position and shape of Under the Town Furlong suggests that it may have been land taken from the waste between Charlton and Wantage and incorporated into the arable. Originally the arable of each system would

⁴⁵ Tate, 1967, 35-8

⁴⁶ BRO D/ELs A8

have been surrounded by the lord's waste. Incorporating land in this manner was a typical and pragmatic medieval solution to a shortage of arable due to population pressure. By the mid-eighteenth century there had been considerable consolidation of the lands in Charlton. Messrs Tubbs (white), Gibbard (cream), Bowerbank (light green with dark surround), Tomkins (red), and Adams (light green) were actively amalgamating their holdings into larger blocks of land. Along the major furlong boundaries in the field were grassed areas known as meers and balks which marked the boundaries between lands. These gave access to the individual strips and provided grazing for tethered livestock. In addition to the grassed headlands, meers and balks, the fields were also crossed by a number of roads and footpaths. Some of these followed the boundaries of the fields, furlongs, and strips, but others cut across the strips.

Each field was planted in a separate course of the arable rotation. Traditionally in a two-field system this was a corn crop followed by a fallow. Three-field arable land could be sown in various ways. In the southern common fields this was typically a winter corn crop of wheat or rye followed by a spring sown crop of barley or oats followed by a cropped or bare fallow. In the Midlands there was often a grain crop of barley, wheat, or rye followed by beans, peas, vetches, or oats and then a fallow. However, while the course in the rotation was based on the field, the different furlongs in that field could be planted with one of various crops. On the two-field system at Harwell Loder divided his lands between barley and wheat with some land planted to pulses and vetches. These last two crops were possibly a 'hitched' or catch crop planted between harvest and the sowing of the barley in the spring.⁴⁷ It was often the case that the soil or condition of a particular furlong was best suited to one of the alternative crops - i.e. rye instead of wheat or vetches rather than oats or barley. However, evidence from Loder's accounts suggests he had considerable freedom in the choice of his crop.⁴⁸ What really mattered was that all the crops in the field were harvested before or at about the same time as the main crop.⁴⁹ The fallow was sometimes left unplanted but part might be hitched with vetches, beans, peas, turnips, or grasses and clover.⁵⁰ Once fed or harvested, the field was thrown open, or 'breached', and made common for the feeding of livestock. The normal rules of ownership associated with the strips in the field came to an end and everyone in the village who had grazing rights on the arable, the 'right of shack', used the whole field for livestock feeding. Because the fallow was open for common grazing for the whole year, hitching took a greater level of co-operation and agreement so that the crop was protected from grazing animals. This co-operation paid dividends. Hitching produced a larger, higher quality supply of feed. Well-fed animals produced more and better quality manure that resulted in a higher fertility level in the fields.

Because winter-feed was essential for the livestock, each holding also had an allocation of meadowland. Like the arable, the meadow was several and therefore closed to livestock in the spring until after the hay was mown and carried. After the harvest it was again thrown open to be grazed by those with the right of shack. Some of the meadowland was watered.⁵¹ This technique, practiced by Loder at Harwell by 1611, produced an earlier crop of grass and helped to increase its output.⁵² The right to use the meadow also varied. Some had full rights on the meadow. They would mow their hay then, once the harvest was complete and the land breached, put livestock onto the aftermath. These animals would graze until spring when the meadow was again closed to communal grazing and made several. Others only had partial rights to the meadows. Those from East and West Hendred and East and West Lockinge who had the right to the first cut of the hay crop in Ardington Meadow did not, for example, have the right to use the meadow for livestock once the hay was carried off the land. That was reserved for the commoners from Ardington alone.⁵³ Others may have had the right to graze the meadow when common without having an allocation of land in the meadow. The way a meadow was divided also varied. Some people owned fixed strips in the meadow just like on the arable. However, in some meadows the ownership of the strips was not set. Each year lots were drawn to determine who would have each parcel.⁵⁴ This random allocation gave everyone involved an equal chance of the best and worst grass. Such meadows were known as 'lott meadows'. White Mead in East Challow had

⁴⁷ BRO D/ELs A8, f 50

⁴⁸ BRO D/ELs A8 ; Fussell, xiii

⁴⁹ Hoskins, 1950, 74

⁵⁰ BRO D/ELs A8

⁵¹ BRO D/P 143 A

⁵² BRO D/ELs A8

⁵³ BRO D/EL/01/1

⁵⁴ For a detailed explanation of the division of meadowland by lot see Tate, 1967, 32-4

both fixed and lot strips.⁵⁵ According to the glebe terrier of 1634 for Letcombe Bassett, the glebe included ‘five lottes one yeare and three another year and these lottes are to be parted yearely as they fall, between the parson of the said Letcombe Bassett and the Miller of the same parish equally.’⁵⁶ The glebe at Letcombe Regis had ‘two acres and a halfe, viz: in the furlong shoutinge upon Woodhill one acre and in the furlonge shouteinge upon the brooke one acre and a halfe more.’⁵⁷ Although the glebes were in different manors and parishes, they both made use of the same meadowland. Intercommoning, where people from a number of parishes shared meadowland and common, was practised on both Ardington Meadow – between East Lockinge, Ardington, and West and East Hendred, and White Mead – between the Challows, and Letcombe Regis and Letcombe Bassett.

Another key feature of the common-field village was its common or waste. Originally this was the unused land that surrounded the meadow and arable fields. By the end of the sixteenth century it was not empty or vacant, merely land used less intensively. It was used by the village to graze animals; it also supplied many other essentials of village life including wood for fuel, tools, and building; it was a source of stones and quarries; it supplied fruit, nuts, and the like to supplement the food from farming. This use of the waste came to be institutionalised in a number of rights of common providing people in the village with specific rights to exploit the lord’s waste. Throughout, however, the lord of the manor was the owner of the soil.⁵⁸ The exact nature of an individual’s rights depended on the status of his or her holding on the lands of the manor. Often the number of animals a person could put on the waste was restricted to the number he could maintain through the winter. On some commons the number of animals each person could graze was controlled by stint or gait –i.e. the number of animals allowed according to the size of holding on the arable. On other commons grazing was unrestricted. There were a number of other rights of common that villagers, including those with no arable land, enjoyed. The right of pannage and of mast, i.e. the right to feeds such as acorns, nuts, and the like – made it possible for people to keep swine; the right of estover allowed wood to be collected for fuel, to maintain hedges, for house building and repairs, and to make tools; turbury gave the right to cut peat or turf for fuel. If there were sufficient land that those with right of pasture were not disadvantaged, the right to put sheep, beasts, and other animals on the waste could be extended to those with no land in the manor. This was known as common in gross.⁵⁹

The Decline of the Common Fields

In 1801 just over half of the agricultural land in the four parishes around Wantage remained in traditional common-field husbandry. Ten years later the area had fallen to under thirteen per cent. A way of life that was generations old was rapidly coming to an end. After 1868, when Charlton was finally enclosed, there was no common land left in these parishes. Common field husbandry was viewed by many of those with the power to bring about change as an archaic form of farming that had little to do with a modern progressive industrialised country.⁶⁰ However, the negative attitude towards the common fields was not caused by a stagnating system incapable of change. There was considerable flexibility of cropping on the common fields. In the seventeenth century Robert Loder in Harwell was able to grow numerous crops on his land in the common field.⁶¹ At Letcombe Regis and East Challow two centuries later the instructions for husbandry during enclosure show that the flexibility had been maintained. They stipulated:

Every years land shall be sown for the season 1802 with such kind of Corn Grain of Grass Seed as the respective Owners or Occupiers shall think proper excepting that no Land which in this Season under a Crop of Wheat Barley or Oats shall be Sown or Planted with any White Straw Crop next season but shall be Planted or Drilled with Beans or Pease or Tares (the said Beans or Pease to be properly hoed twice at least) or with some other Vegetable Crop and no more than One fourth part

⁵⁵ BRO D/EF P3 Mortimer, 79, 98-9, 103; 3

⁵⁶ Mortimer, 98

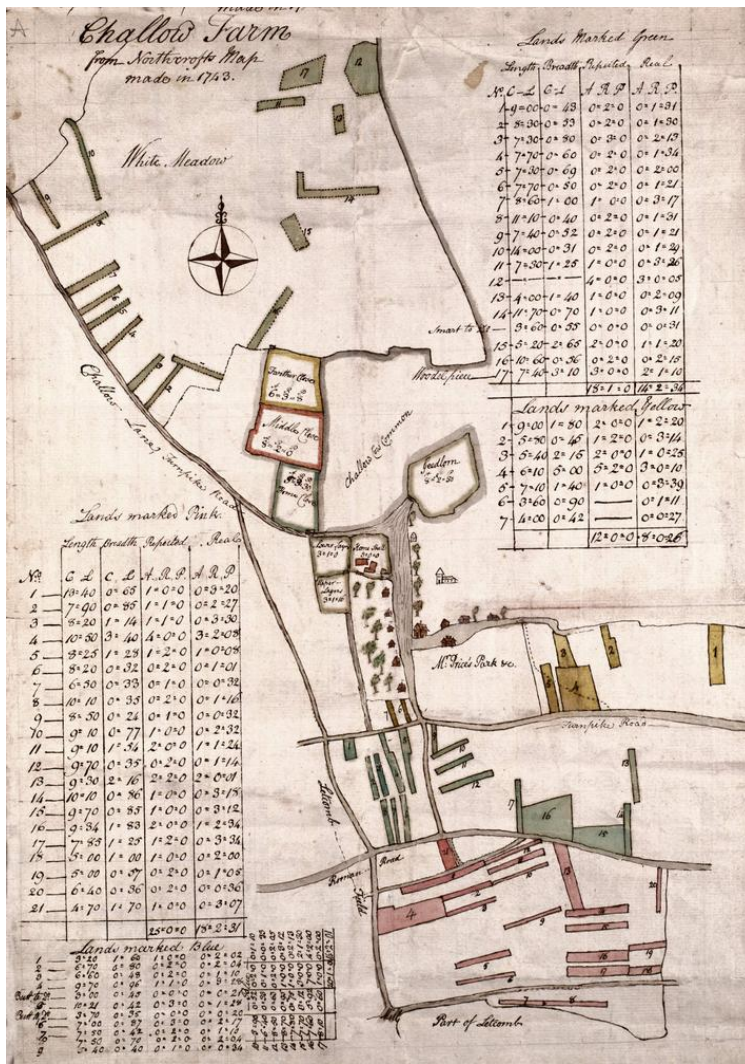
⁵⁷ Mortimer, 99

⁵⁸ Young, 1808, 56

⁵⁹ Gonner, 5-14

⁶⁰ This is particularly clear in the works of the late eighteenth century agriculturalists Arthur Young and William Marshall.

⁶¹ BRO D/ELs A8



Interestingly, even the location of the individual strips within the fields was often a mystery to the owner. Maps made locating the estate land simpler.

Source: BRO D/EW P21

Common field maps such as this were important documents for estate owners in that they helped to keep track of land in the fields and meadow. Because the location of the strips was so complex and because the land was generally farmed by tenants rather than the owner himself, it was not uncommon for the exact location of estate land to be unknown.⁶⁴ The 1743 map shows the scattered strips of a relatively large holding in East Challow. Like in the hamlet of Charlton, the homestead was typically located on the road as it passed through the village. Around the house were the traditional enclosed croft or backfield and two other small closes. The other farmsteads of the village were also found along the main roads of the village. There were also another four small closes – i.e. areas of enclosed land across the turnpike from the homestead. Challow Farm had over 43 acres of arable land scattered in 45 strips throughout the three common fields, Eblands, Challow, and Great Challow. It also contained almost fifteen acres of meadow in another seventeen strips in White Mead (see table 2.2). Here commoners from the townships of East Challow, West Challow, Letcombe Regis, and Letcombe Bassett had intercommoning rights to this meadowland. The land in the meadow was

of the said every years Land in each persons Occupation shall be Sown with Wheat for the Season of 1802...

We do hereby order and direct that the Agreement called the hitching Agreement shall be considered as the general rule or Guide till further directions are given.⁶²

This rotation was as advanced as many of those practised on enclosed arable fields of the time. Again, some thirty years later, at the time of the tithe survey before commutation, the tithe commissioners found that the common fields at East Lockinge continued to be worked in a four-course rotation of wheat, barley or oats, clover, and beans, peas, turnips, or fallow.⁶³ Again this was a flexible and reasonably sophisticated rotation.

The problem with the common and/or open field husbandry was not so much one of flexibility, but more one of complexity, inconvenience, and inefficiency. It only allowed a limited amount of specialisation and individual initiative. The complexity and inconvenience of the common fields can be more easily understood by looking at a map of the lands belonging to Challow Farm in the three common fields and the meadow of East Challow (see

⁶² BRO D/EM O8

⁶³ National Archives, Kew IR18 /13196

⁶⁴ This information was supplied by Dr John Chapman

allocated both by lott and through permanent possession.⁶⁵ The occupier of Challow Farm had the same land each year. In addition to the

Table 2.1 Distribution and size of unenclosed holdings of Challow Farm, East Challow

Field	Land use	Number of strips in field	Area of holding in field (acres)	Size of lands (acres)		
				Avg.	Max.	Min.
Eblands (yellow)	Arable	7	8.16	1.66	3.06	0.17
Challow (blue-green)	Arable	17	16.51	0.97	4.50	0.13
Great Challow (pink)	Arable	21	18.69	0.89	3.55	0.20
Total arable		45	43.36	0.96		
White Meadow	Meadow	17	14.71	0.85	3.03	0.19
Total		62	58.07	0.94		

Source: BRO D/EW P21

97.35 acres of land in the various closes, the arable fields and the meadows, Challow Farm would have had rights to graze the waste and common. At the time of the enclosure award for Letcombe Regis and East Challow in 1804, the farm belonged to Exuperious Turnor. He claimed common of pasture for '3 cows in Great Challow Common at all commonable times, common of pasture in White Mead for such stock of horses cows sheep as are kept in East Challow at all commonable times, and the exclusive right to the feed of the

roads in East Challow'.⁶⁶ The holding was widely dispersed around the village. Time spent travelling from one strip to the next for husbandry operations, moving equipment around the holding, and supervising labour was saved once land in a parish was consolidated and enclosed.

The biggest problem with communal husbandry was simple. It was becoming increasingly inappropriate for the economic and social conditions of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It developed in an earlier period to meet the needs of a largely self-sufficient village. At Wigston Magna, Leicestershire in the sixteenth century W.G. Hoskins found:

the parish grew enough flax and hemp to meet its own needs for linen sheets, napkins, towels, and clothing; it produced enough wool from its own sheep to keep the five or six village tailors well supplied. Its barley, grown over several hundred acres every year, supplied food and drink; and its wheat, rye, oats, peas, and beans provided food for all men and beasts. Every cottage and farmhouse had its own poultry (chiefly geese, but ducks and hens were numerous), and most kept pigs and bees. All had herb gardens and many had small orchards; so the village had meat, bacon, eggs, cheese, butter, milk, honey, apples, and herbs of all kinds.⁶⁷

This type of non-specialised, non-intensive husbandry was well suited to a self-sufficient open and common field village. As the market economy developed and agricultural specialisation according to regional and local strengths became more common, areas, particularly on the heavier soils in the north of the four parishes were found to be best suited to livestock feeding, meat and wool production, and dairying. On the other hand, parts of the downs in the south could profitably be converted from waste to arable production. The increasing stress on specialised production eventually exposed a fundamental weakness of the system and led to its demise. The common field system was simply too universal. There was little scope for the system to be adapted to meet varying soil conditions, topography, and marketing opportunities. Generally, communal agriculture discouraged individual initiative. Traditional attitudes and methods dominated the system. The shift towards specialised, more productive and intensive, scientific agriculture was beyond the scope of a system established to provide the needs of a largely self-sufficient community. Enclosure facilitated such change.

⁶⁵ Mortimer, 79, 98-9, 103; BRO D/EF P3

⁶⁶ Award and BRO D/EEI E9- shows that he claimed the dwelling and closes and is likely to have held the remainder of the land in the arable fields and meadow.

⁶⁷ Hoskins, 1957b, 191

Chapter 3

Non-Parliamentary Enclosure

While in 1801 just over half of the land in the four parishes was still worked in a traditional common-field system, the rest either had never been common or had been enclosed through non-parliamentary means (see Appendix I). Compared with other parts of England, this was a relatively large proportion of land still in an area to be enclosed without the use of an act. In England as a whole, approximately eighty per cent of the land was never affected by Parliamentary enclosure and some areas were never farmed in a common field system.⁶⁸ In those that had been open and common, there were a number of ways other than by obtaining an act from Parliament to enclose. These included piecemeal enclosure, where a small area of land was taken out of the communal agriculture and enclosed, and more general forms of enclosure affecting the whole of the community.⁶⁹ Each of these methods had advantages and disadvantages. Piecemeal enclosure often was carried out in a haphazard manner with relatively small plots of land being fenced and used in severalty. It was often done through an informal agreement and generally depended on the goodwill of others. It was an insecure and often contested means of enclosure. Its impact on the landscape was equally haphazard and unsystematic. General enclosure ended communal rights and obligations in the whole of a farming system. It was most often achieved by one of two means. In the first, unity of possession was achieved when one person held all the land in a manor so that common rights and open field regulations simply ceased to be relevant. Secondly, when a number of people held land to be enclosed, they had to enter into some form of agreement. This could be informal or could take a form much like that used in a parliamentary enclosure. Although this was a reasonably secure form of enclosure, there was the possibility that at some future time someone would challenge its legal status. From the seventeenth century if the owners wanted to ensure the legal status of enclosure, or if no other means of enclosure were possible, a majority or the owners, by value rather than by number, could petition Parliament for an act to enclose part or all of a parish.⁷⁰

Piecemeal Enclosure

Piecemeal enclosure took a number of forms from a simple, illegal encroachment on the waste to formal agreements between the lord of the manor and some of his tenants. However, it typically concerned only the land of a single individual and not of the entire manor. While only small areas of land were removed from the open field or the waste at any one time, the procedure could eventually result in the enclosure of all the land in a parish. This happened in parishes in the Chiltern Hills as well as in many other parts of England including Dorset and Somerset, Kent and Surrey, and parts of south and west Yorkshire.⁷¹ In the area around Wantage piecemeal enclosure occurred along side more general enclosure. However, in each of the four parishes enclosure was only completed by parliamentary award in the nineteenth century. Piecemeal enclosure, however, eventually affected a significant part of the region and, in spite of the spread of modern urban areas, evidence of this more haphazard form of enclosure remains visible in the landscape today.

The lord of the manor could take the initiative in enclosing land in the arable fields and the meadows, sometimes through agreement with his tenants. Enclosure through agreement became increasingly common from the late sixteenth century.⁷² Because many of these agreements are early in date and their is haphazard. Two are known for the Wantage area. The first is a draft agreement dated 11 October 1596 between the lord of the manor and eighteen of his tenants to enclose part of the Lower

⁶⁸ Turner, 1980, 32

⁶⁹ For a more complete discussion of the methods of enclosing see Chapman & Seeligar, 2001, 13-30 and Gonner, 43-69, Yelling, 47-93

⁷⁰ It was possible to bring in a private bill earlier but the systematically use of this means of enclosure began in the reign of Queen Anne (1702-14). Gonner 58-9

⁷¹ Roden , 365-71; Yelling, 27-8

⁷² Thirsk, 1967a, 254-5

Mead in West Challow.⁷³ The tenants were recompensed for the enclosure but the details are illegible. The second agreement was made at Ardington on 9 October 1635 between

John Clarke, lord of the manor, and twenty-four of his tenants. Clarke wanted to enclose nineteen lands of arable ground adjoining his manor house that he considered 'fitt & necessary for the keeping of milche beasts for the provision of his howse'. This arable land, known as the Kitchin Peice, was breached or opened for common grazing from the Feast of All Saints [1 November] until it was again to be made several and sown (see fig. 3.1). In return for their consent, Clarke granted his tenants the right of commoning on a like quantity of land by Ickleton Way that was at that time only available for the lord's use. In addition, Clarke agreed to improve the North Marsh

Common by grubbing up some of the bushes growing there.⁷⁴

Agreements could also be made between smaller owners. In the early years of the eighteenth century a number of the landowners in the hamlet of Grove chose to enclose an area that by 1754 was aptly known as the 'New Broke Land'.⁷⁵ Although no formal agreement has been found for these enclosures, a deed of 1720 recites the terms and conditions of one agreement along with the manner in which the allocation was to be made. On 6 of April 1719, seven people agreed to divide and enclose just under 55 acres of common land used for grazing sheep. The first four plots, two of nine acres, one of five acres and the last of four and a half acres, were allotted to men with specific requests that the land be near their dwellings or other ground. The other three plots of nine acres each were allocated by lot with each man drawing a clay ball, with an allocation inside, out of a bag. The agreement specified roads and bridleways to be built and maintained in each allotment along with who had the right to feed the verges. All were to make mounds to mark the boundaries of their allotments.⁷⁶ The agreement illustrates several traditional concerns that were to be enshrined in later parliamentary enclosure allocations. These included the location of an enclosure near a dwelling, the consolidation of holdings by locating the allotment adjacent to an existing holding, along with provision of roads and footpaths and responsibility for them. However, the impact on the landscape of piecemeal enclosure was very unlike that of parliamentary enclosure.⁷⁷ The New Broke Land in Grove illustrates the result of piecemeal enclosure - small, irregularly shaped enclosures with considerable fragmentation and a lack of consolidation (see fig. 3.2). After enclosure the land use practised in the small closes was much more varied than that in the original area. Some closes remained in pasture while others were converted to tillage.⁷⁸ The size of the closes would have made them ideal for grazing



Fig 3.1 Kitchin Peice, Ardington was enclosed and converted from arable to a cow pasture near his manor house by John Clarke in 1635. In return he extended the common rights of those tenants involved to land by Ickleton Way that had previously been several. This is a typical piecemeal enclosure by the lord of the manor.

Source: BRO D/EL P1

⁷³ Oxfordshire Records Office WANT VIII/iii/3

⁷⁴ BRO D/ECw/E3; reproduced in full in Wordie p 211

⁷⁵ BRO D/EC0 P1

⁷⁶ BRO D/EL T106

⁷⁷ Chapman and Seeliger, 2002, 25

⁷⁸ BRO D/EL T106

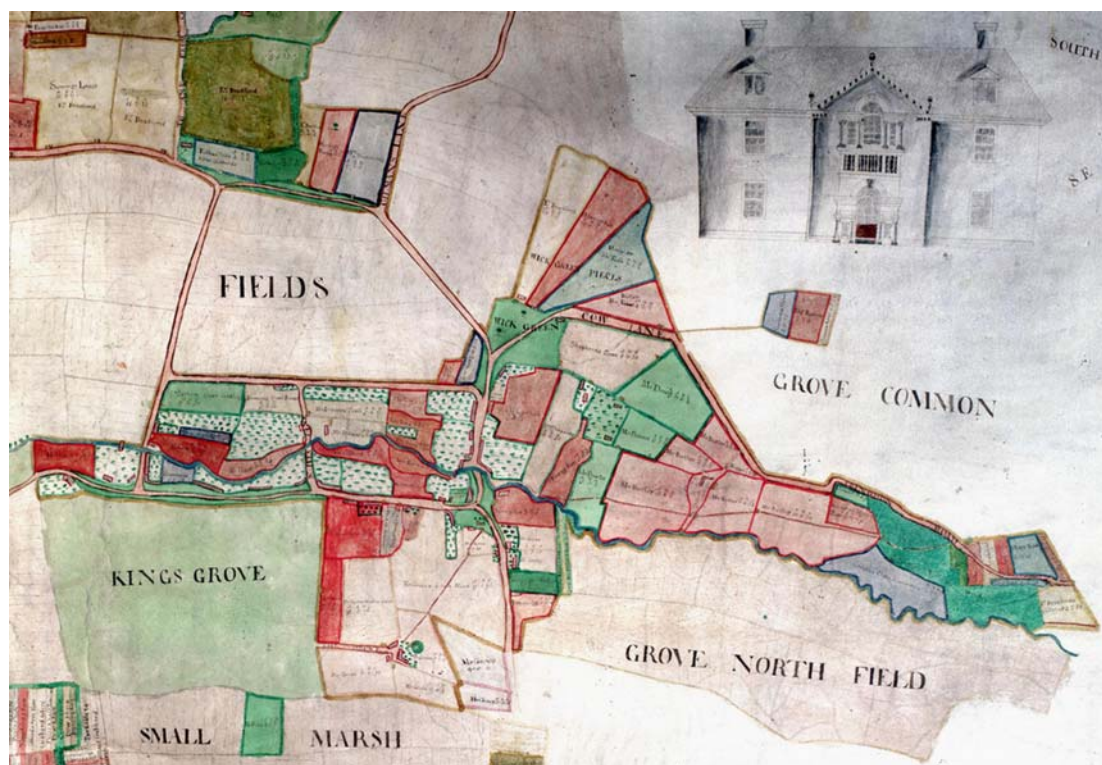


Fig 3.2 The small fields in New Broke Land, Grove (orientation east-west) were made several through piecemeal enclosure in the late seventeenth or early eighteenth century. There was limited effort to consolidate the holdings and the landscape shows none of the planning of general enclosures. The land at Wick Green involved in the 1719 agreement is the section around the green at the Y-junction including the pie-shaped enclosures in the top left corner of the map.
Source: BRO D/EC0 P1

or for growing high value arable crops. The map suggests that a considerable area may have been planted as orchard.

On a much smaller scale were the piecemeal enclosures created by simply fencing of strips in the open fields. This was often a gradual process. First a farmer might make a temporary enclosure around a crop that he wanted either to grow for longer than the regular course or that needed to be harvested or fed differently than the crop in the rotation. This was not an unusual occurrence. The lands were held in severalty from the time the stock was driven from the field so that the field could be sown until the crop was harvested or fed. The owner could feed the strip using hurdles or by tethering, or ‘nogging’, the stock. When the field was fallow the enclosed strip was often included in the common grazing land of the fallow. This meant that the decision of an individual to create a temporary enclosure did not impinge on the rights of the rest of the community to use the fallow. Over time, some of the fenced strips, particularly those on the fringe of the field or in reasonably compact blocks that did not interfere with the farming of the arable field, became permanent closes that were no longer thrown the open for the village stock.⁷⁹ The legality of such an enclosure was uncertain. Some believed that the right to feed the open field had been established by custom and thus was inviolable. Others argued that in open field husbandry the laws of trespass were simply ignored when the field was opened to livestock and the common grazing of the fields came about through the convenience rather than through any sort of grant. Consequently, it was argued, there was no legal reason for a farmer not to fence his property.⁸⁰ Others in the open field may have turned a blind eye to the enclosure in case they might eventually want to do the same. The ease with which such enclosures could be made varied from over time and from place to place.⁸¹ However, even if there were opposition to the action, it was difficult to force a farmer to open his land to grazing if he were really determined not to. After a

⁷⁹ Hoskins, 1957a, 160-64

⁸⁰ Gonner, 46

⁸¹ Thirsk, 1967a, 202-3

number of years, usually quoted as twenty, but sometimes fifty, the rights of others to graze the strip would cease through lack of use, and the land became an ‘ancient enclosure’.

It could happen that a single landholder was able to consolidate strips by purchase until a large part, or even the whole of a field was in his possession. William Wiseman Clarke, Lord of the Manor of Ardington, did this in Ardington. At the time of the Parliamentary enclosure in 1811, the trustees of the Lambourn Almshouses wanted their allotment of land in Ardington to be located next to their buildings, mill, and orchard in West Field (see 4.3 and 4.4). However, Clarke claimed the whole of the field as an old enclosure. The charity found witnesses to give evidence to prove that it remained common land. In spite of this, the enclosure commissioners ruled that, because it had not be grazed regularly for twenty years, it was indeed an ‘ancient’ enclosure and therefore Clarke’s several property of Clarke.⁸² He had successfully enclosed the smallest field in the parish by stealth. Common rights had to be exercised. If they were not, they lapsed.

Similar piecemeal enclosure, or encroachment, occurred on the wastes and commons of a manor. The legal status of these enclosures was quite different than those in the open arable fields. The lord of the manor was the owner of the soil. Others used the land through various ‘rights of common’. Provided the waste or common was not overrun with livestock, and in the Wantage area there seems to have been sufficient grazing land, the lord of the manor could allow encroachments. At the manor court the person encroaching would be fined for the encroachment but would not be made to tear down the fencing. In 1721 the manor court at East Challow, for example, ordered ‘... that Thomas Tullis of East Challow shall throw up the inclosure and quit the possession of the Ground he that inclosed on the Lords wast’. He was fined 40 shillings.⁸³ Tullis continued to occupy the land and pay the fine. Because he could impose fines for encroachment, the lord of the manor tolerated such enclosures and happily took what was a *de facto* rent. The encroachments along with the enclosures in the open fields were a problem when the rest of the land in the parish was enclosed. They made it difficult to create compact holdings. Consequently they were often subjected to redistribution by the enclosure commissioners. Because of this, evidence for these in the modern landscape is somewhat limited. However, documents occasionally locate them. A 1753 map of the lands in East Challow belonging to Governors’ of the Town Lands of Wantage show a number of small enclosures in Great Challow Common.⁸⁴ At Charlton just off Bowling Lane was a one-and-a-half acre close, Well’s Close, that according to a deed of 1723 was ‘formerly pasture, now arable, divided and separate’.⁸⁵

General Enclosure

General enclosure differed from piecemeal enclosure in its impact simply because it involved the division, allocation, and enclosure of the whole of the communal husbandry system in a manor. Once enclosure occurred, all common rights were extinguished and land was held in severalty, the role of the manor court in regulating village agriculture ended, and the control by the individual began. The impact of this type of enclosure on the landscape varied according to the time, size, and reason for the enclosure and to the number of people involved. In general, however, the fields were larger and there was more consolidation of holdings.

Because general agreement to enclose had to be obtained, the number of proprietors involved in an enclosure greatly affected the ease with which an open field system with all its common rights could be ended. If just one person owned all the land in a common field system and if just one or two people farmed it, the existing customary arrangements could simply be set aside. This was often done through the deliberate consolidation of ownership in a manor in order to effect enclosure. During the Tudor period the government repeatedly introduced legislation to prevent the disappearance of the common fields. The Husbandry Act of 1489 made it illegal to cause the decay of a ‘house of husbandry’. Another act of 1515 made the conversion of tillage to pasture illegal. Further anti-enclosure legislation preventing the keeping of excessively large flocks of sheep was introduced in 1533 and 1555.⁸⁶ In

⁸² BRO D/QI C14

⁸³ BRO D/EF/ M5

⁸⁴ BRO D/ EF P3

⁸⁵ BRO D/Ex 262 T1

⁸⁶ Thirsk, 1967a, 216-36; Chapman & Seeliger, 2002, 10-11; Yelling 20-1

spite of this, enclosure achieved through unity of possession was common during these years. Although closely associated with depopulating enclosures, this method was used wherever such consolidation was possible. It was particularly effective in smaller hamlets and on poorer soils where there were likely to be fewer people to remove.⁸⁷ An example of this occurred in the tithing of West Lockinge in the parish of Wantage. The process appears to have been initiated by Moore family who held both the manor and the land from 1617 until it was left to

trustees to cover debts in 1733.⁸⁸ By 1720 the tithing was farmed under two leases, Upper Farm of approximately 660 acres, and Lower or Neville's Farm of 94 acres. By 1770 when the land was sold by George Prescott to Sir John

Table 3.1 Alleged Enclosures Presented to the Wolsey Commission

Location and Manor	Person enclosing	ate	I rea	A	E victions
Ardington	William Johnson, copyholder	506	1 0	5	4
Betterton	John Colyns, copyholder	498	1 5	3	4
East Lockinge	Alicia Doo, copyholder	510	1 0	3	4
West Lockinge	Thomas Alworth, copyholder	510	1 0	2	3
Dyngollys, Grove	John Isbury, freeholder	498	1 4	2	2
Tullwick, Grove	John Saunders	501	1 5	5	4
Crokkers, Grove	Fitzwarren, Lord of the manor	510	1 0	3	2
Total			244	23	

Source: Leadam, vol 1, 108, 113-6

Reade, Upper and Lower Farms were held in severalty with no common land shared between them, and the downland, formerly waste but by then part of Upper Farm, had been converted to arable. The farm also included 399 acres of arable below the hill that were farmed in severalty. Lower Farm contained 44 acres of enclosed arable and another 50 acres of enclosed meadow and pasture.⁸⁹ The owner and lord of the manor of West Lockinge created two enclosed farms and extinguished the common rights on the downs as well as on the arable and meadow.

Such enclosure activity had a long precedent. Six sites in the Wantage area, Woodhill, Tulwick, Petwick, East and West Betterton, and West Ginge were deserted or shrunken medieval villages.⁹⁰ Conventional wisdom argues that villages disappeared, particularly in the period between 1440 and 1520 as a result of landowners evicting their tenants to enclose the land, and converting the arable to pasture for grazing. Such evictions did occur.⁹¹ As early as 1341 an inquiry found that there had been a considerable reduction in land under the plough.⁹² Six cases were brought before the Commission convened in 1517/18 by Cardinal Wolsey to investigate depopulating enclosures of arable land, against landowners in the Wantage area (see Table 3.1). However, it is now agreed that loss of population preceded enclosure and led to the eventual desertion of villages. As the population fell in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, people migrated to areas with superior soils and easier farming conditions. This resulted in a general weakening of the communal activities of the village, leaving it susceptible to consolidation by an owner or his tenant interested in converting the land to pasture.⁹³ The location of the deserted villages on the more difficult soils around the periphery of the area would support this theory. In the north were the heavy clays that were best farmed as meadow or permanent pasture. In the south were the downs, traditionally used for pasturing sheep. In the centre of the region

⁸⁷ Yelling 25; Beresford and Hurst, 1971, 20-9; Beresford, 1954, 247-60

⁸⁸ *Victoria County History*, 4, 309

⁸⁹ BRO D/EL/T1; Havinden, 1999, 50

⁹⁰ Brooks, vol1, 10-11; Beresford & Husrt, 183; Wordie, 7, 101-2, 179

⁹¹ Harvey, 116

⁹² Harvey, 106-7

⁹³ Brooks, Vol. 1, 89; Yelling 24

were the fertile, easily worked loams. As holdings became available in the central area of the region, migration helped maintain the population of the manors there at the expense of those on the clays and downs. Once the population dropped below a critical point it was simple to enclose the land and convert to less labour intensive pastoral husbandry.

Tulwick, Woodhill, and Petwick were medieval villages located on the heavier soils in the north of the region. By the time of the parliamentary enclosure each of the manors had been reduced to one or two enclosed farms. No agreement has been found that for these enclosures. However, because conventional agriculture could not function properly in periods of depopulation, the conditions that prevailed between the fifteenth and the seventeenth century were favourable to conversion to pasture for either wool production or dairying. Initially labour shortages made it logical to convert land from arable to grass. In the later years sales of dairy products in particular held up well during a period when prices for most other agricultural products were unstable.⁹⁴ The early enclosure in this area is reflected in the place names. The term 'wick' refers to a farm, often specifically a dairy farm, hence Petwick and Tulwick, as well as Grove Wick, and Ardington Wick.⁹⁵ The area was ideally suited for conversion to grass. The heavy clay was difficult if not impossible to work during much of the winter. Because stocking very tenacious clays when wet caused long-term damage to the soil, some of the land could not be grazed and was best suited for use as meadowland. Pastoral husbandry needed far less labour than arable so the conversion to livestock farming was often blamed for the depopulation. In reality, it was a sensible use of the land in a period when there was insufficient labour to work large areas of cropped land. Conversion to dairying appears to have taken place at Petwick (see fig 3.3) by

Fig 3.3 Petwick, located on the heavy clays in the north of West Challow, has been identified as a deserted medieval village that was enclosed during the Tudor period. As the population fell, tenants were able to be more selective about the land they chose to farm and moved to areas with better quality land. Conventional agriculture was no longer viable leaving the land to be consolidation into one hand, enclosed, and converted to dairying.

Source: BRO Q/RDC 21B

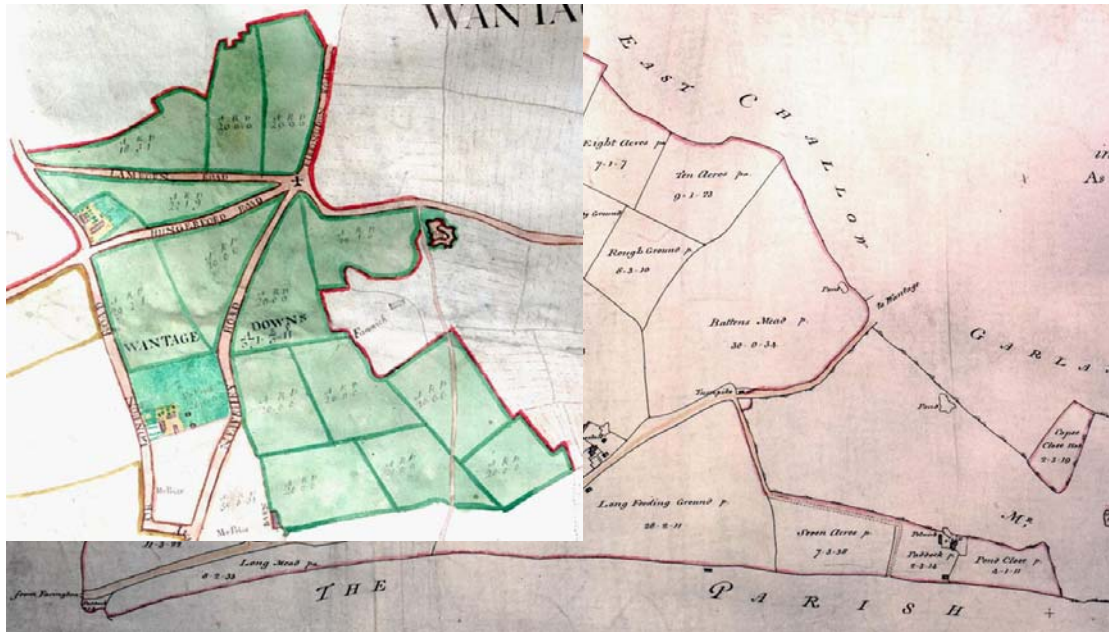
1484-5 and at Woodhill between 1500 and 1550.⁹⁶ Such conversion depended on enclosure, or at least an agreement to end the open field arrangement in a manor. Loss of population and the consolidation of the land in one or two hands made enclosure relatively simple. When all the land was owned and/or tenanted by just one person, common rights would simply no longer apply. Thus, by 1688, Woodhill was an enclosed farm belonging to Robert Barnard and Tulwick was an ancient manorial estate owned by the Saunders family until 1503 and then by John Yates.⁹⁷

⁹⁴ Thirsk, 1970, 148-51; Harvey, 43-5, 113-5; Thirsk, 1967b, 66-7, 209

⁹⁵ Gilling, 791; Smith, 259

⁹⁶ Brooks, vol1 93

⁹⁷ BRO D/AI 179/70



The other area of deserted or shrunken medieval villages was in the south of the region. This included the manors of East and West Betterton and of West Ginge. The villages, located about a mile south of the more successful sites of Ardington, East Lockinge, Wantage, and Letcombe Regis lacked the fertile mixed loams found in the centre of the region. As in the north of the area, the general fall in population resulted in the migration to better quality lands. At Betterton there was a real effort to consolidate ownership of the manor by the Collins family. In 1494 John Colyns took the lease of the by then consolidated Betterton Manor.⁹⁸ As the lord of the manor, he was alleged to have enclosed 35 acres for parkland in

1498 and a further 50 acres of arable in 1501 resulting in the eviction of eleven people (see Table 3.1). By 1718 when a rate for repairing the church was levied in Lockinge parish, only one person, Charles Collins, had land in Betterton.⁹⁹ Collins was successful in uniting the whole of the manor into a single holding thus making it possible to extinguish common rights in the manor. There was no need for a formal agreement. Enclosure was completed through unity of possession, not through ownership but, instead, as a lessee the Dean and Chapter of Westminster, West Ginge, another hamlet in the parish of East Lockinge, was not a deserted medieval village but certainly a shrunken one. Again, there is no evidence showing a formal agreement to enclose the manor. In 1718 Matthew Wymondsold, a speculator in the South Sea Company, began purchasing land in the East Lockinge area. At that time there were seven holdings in the hamlet of West Ginge.¹⁰⁰ Wymondsold's aim was to consolidate the farms into enclosed, more efficient, more valuable holdings.¹⁰¹ Because West Ginge was a small hamlet with its own field system, consolidation was relatively easy. By 1767 Matthew Wymondsold owned all of West Ginge and the Church family farmed it.¹⁰² Once again, enclosure was achieved through unity of possession. Although not identified as the site of a deserted village, the ancient manorial estate at Furzwick, also called Fotteswick, in the same area was created by another early enclosure.¹⁰³ In 1690 the land was sold to Robert Throckmorton. By 1717 it was listed as a farm tenanted by Thomas Stiles.¹⁰⁴ Sometime shortly after 1720 it became part of the Wymondsold estate and by the time of the 1754 map contained approximately 300 acres of enclosed land (see fig. 3.4). Again, the name suggests that it was established as a farm, but its location under the downs suggests that it may well have been used for sheep rather than for dairying.

⁹⁸ *Victoria County History* 4, 310

⁹⁹ Havinden, 1999, 243-4

¹⁰⁰ MERL BER 43/6/8

¹⁰¹ Havinden, 37-8

¹⁰² *Victoria County History*, 4, 309; Havinden, 1999, 39-40

¹⁰³ *Victoria County History*, 4, 324

¹⁰⁴ BRO Q R Rp 4, f 13

Finally, whole parishes could be enclosed by agreement. As early as 1539 Fitzherbert, an agricultural writer, advocated enclosure by agreement. He wrote:

hath hee every field in severall, and by the assent of the Lords & the tenants, every neighbour may change land with the other: and then shall hys farme be twice so good in profit to the tenant as it was before and as much Lande kept in tillage.¹⁰⁵

This form of enclosure, often ratified by Chancery Court, was increasingly common from the mid-sixteenth century. From the early seventeenth century the mechanism of enrolling the enclosure at a Westminster court increased the popularity of these agreements.¹⁰⁶ They continued to be used even after Parliamentary enclosure became popular in the mid-eighteenth century.¹⁰⁷ Evidence is often elusive. However, in Berkshire twenty-two enclosure agreements have been identified, including ten in the eighteenth century after enclosure by act was increasing in popularity.¹⁰⁸ Agreements were most popular and successful when economic conditions were favourable, particularly once the interest in agricultural improvement had developed.¹⁰⁹ To have any chance of success, there had to be a general belief that the new arrangements would be beneficial and profitable. This was the motivation behind an attempt to agree to enclose East Lockinge. In 1776 Thomas Blandy of Upton near Andover, Hampshire drew up formal articles of agreement to be signed by 'each and every' of the proprietors to sign for enclosing the parish of East Lockinge (see fig. 3.5). The contents of the agreement were very similar to an act. Referees, Blandy suggested three, would be 'indifferently chosen & elected to allot &

Fig. 3.4 Furzwick Farm, Wantage was an ancient manorial estate and likely to have been enclosed by unity of possession. The date of enclosure is uncertain but it was several by the early eighteenth century and possibly much earlier. The suffix 'wick' suggests that it was used as a farm, often a dairy but in this case more likely for sheep.

Source: BRO D/FCo P1

divide all the said common fields & Downs'. These referees were to have the same range of powers given to commissioners carrying out an act. By Michaelmas in the year of the agreement, the land was to be several.¹¹⁰ In January 1778 the Honourable and Reverend John Tracy, Rector of East Lockinge, Sarah Wymondsold, widow of Matthew and future wife of John Pollexfen Bastard, and other proprietors of lands in East Lockinge petitioned Parliament for an act of enclosure. This was to confirm and already existing agreement 'to have the said Common Field Lands inclosed and divided, in certain Proportions already adjusted and settled between themselves'. In addition to the clauses agreed in the draft articles of agreement there was a provision to 'settle upon the said Rector and his Successors a Corn Rent, and a certain Quantity of Land more conveniently suited for his Use, in lieu of his Tythes.'¹¹¹ The petitioners were given leave to introduce a bill, but this was never done. Nor was the agreement carried out. Although the norm in places like the East Midlands, it was unusual for any alteration of the tithes, either through a corn rent or through land compensation, to be made in Berkshire. That this was proposed in the petition suggests that the rector was undecided about the enclosure. There was a long-standing disagreement between the rectors of the parish and Matthew Wymondsold that may explain why East Lockinge remained unenclosed until 1853.¹¹²

The most important advantage that private agreements to enclose had over Parliamentary enclosure was overall expense. The process of petitioning Parliament for an act to enclose added considerably to the cost of enclosure. On the other hand agreements had several important disadvantages. First, it required a unanimous decision by the proprietors to enclose. The legality of such enclosures was also somewhat problematical. Could the agreement of a person be binding on successors if land were held in trust or belonged to an institution such as the church or one of the Oxford Colleges? A number fell through because of uncertainty about the legality of the action. Occasionally an agreement was simply

¹⁰⁵ Fitzherbert, 1598, 87

¹⁰⁶ Thirsk, 1967(a), 237-8

¹⁰⁷ For more details of the use of agreements see Chapman & Seeliger, 1995; 1997; 2002

¹⁰⁸ This information was supplied by Dr John Chapman; see also Wordie

¹⁰⁹ Yelling 18-23

¹¹⁰ MERL BER 43/5/29

¹¹¹ Journal of the House of Commons, XXXVI, 643

¹¹² MERL BER 43/1/3, 43/8/5 & /10; Havinden, 1999, 38-9

disregarded, often by an heir once land came out of trust. This could be circumvented in several ways. One was to take a case, often collusive, to Chancery Court. In 1609 Richard Rydler brought a case claiming loss of glebe lands in Hampstead Marshall as a result of a general agreement to exchange plots with a view to enclose.¹¹³ Again in 1613 Thomas Saverye and others brought a case against Sir George Hyde alleging illegal enclosure of the commons of South Denchworth.¹¹⁴ Both of these cases suggest that an agreement had been made and a case taken to Chancery to ensure its legality. Another means of establishing unquestionable legality of an agreement was to obtain a Parliamentary act confirming the agreement. The 1743 act for Aston Tirrold, an act dated the same year for Earley, and a 1746 act for Inkpen were all confirmation of earlier agreements.¹¹⁵ The problems involved with agreements and other forms of non-parliamentary enclosure were sufficiently great that one-third of the land in Berkshire and half in the parishes of Letcombe Regis, Wantage, East Lockinge, and Ardington resorted to the complexity and cost of obtaining an act of Parliament of enclose any remaining common land.

¹¹³ PRO C78/174/9

¹¹⁴ PRO C78/181/8

¹¹⁵ Tate and Turner 60; Wordie 10, 93, 141

Chapter 4

The Process of Parliamentary Enclosure

A traveller passing through the Wantage area in 1800 would have seen a patchwork of enclosed and unenclosed hamlets. Land in the north of the four parishes had long been enclosed. In this part of the region farmers were able to specialise in livestock production. Again, in the south of the parishes, eighteenth century enclosures had made it possible for farmers convert relatively poor downland sheepwalk to a more productive arable/sheep husbandry. The adjoining parishes of Farnborough, Letcombe Bassett, and Childrey were enclosed through acts of Parliament in the 1770s. The enclosure of Farnborough and an agreement to enclose an area of common grazed by both Farnborough and Betterton may have encouraged Matthew Wymondsold to suggest, unsuccessfully, that East Lockinge should enclose in 1778. It was another several decades before there was sufficient incentive and agreement for any of the four parishes around Wantage to begin the process of petitioning Parliament. In the ten years between 1801 and 1811, however, 73.5 per cent of the remaining area of open field, common meadow, and waste and commons was enclosed. The first parish to complete the process was West Challow in 1803. Letcombe Regis and East Challow followed in 1804, Wantage and Grove in 1806 and Ardington in 1811. In doing so, they joined part of a widespread, national movement to end traditional agriculture. East Lockinge and Charlton were slower to enclose (see Appendix 1). On the 23rd June 1810 John Pollexfen Bastard wrote the following to the Rev Dr Isham at All Soul's College, Oxford

Under the idea that the same advantage would accrue to inclosing Lockinge, as has to the neighbouring Parishes which have been recently inclosed, I venture to propose the Measure to you. Certain it is that the Tithe of the common field will benefit considerably independent of the consideration of the Quantity of Downs, furze, and waste that will be brought into cultivation, and which is now worth scarcely anything to the Tithe.¹¹⁶

This proposal, however advantageous it may have been, came to nothing and the remaining 25 per cent of land in East Lockinge were not enclosed until 1853. Charlton, enclosed in 1868, was the penultimate enclosure in Berkshire.

Both of these enclosures were carried out under the General Act of 1845.

Obtaining an Act to Enclose

Once several in a parish had decided that enclosure was a viable proposition and that it was preferable to do so by act rather than by private agreement, the first official step was to petition Parliament for leave to present a bill. Because enclosure was expensive, the decision was a major one for the parish. Arthur Young, a well-known agriculturalist selected to report on parliamentary enclosure by the Board of Agriculture in 1808, found the average cost of all parliamentary enclosures to 1800 was slightly more than £1650.¹¹⁷ This could vary widely. At Longcot the 1797 enclosure took one year and cost £3153 5s 3d, an average of £1.77 per acre. The 1818 enclosure at Great Shefford took six years and cost £1397 10s averaging £2.62 per acre.¹¹⁸ Even the cost of obtaining an act was high. The average for all acts up to 1800 was £497.¹¹⁹ At Englefield, where the enclosure was particularly complex and lasted twenty years, the cost of obtaining the act to enclose thirty-four acres was £563 19s 5d.¹²⁰ At Longcot in Shrivenham enclosure cost £525 16s 10d, and at Great Shefford £510.¹²¹ Before incurring the cost of obtaining an act, it was wise to make certain that a majority – generally at least two-thirds by value of landowners were in favour of the enclosure. This could either be done through personal contact with the owners themselves, or by using a representative. Often a future enclosure commissioner would be asked to canvas the owners and then guide the parish through the drafting of the bill. If there appeared to be sufficient support, a bill was prepared. Notice was then given to the people of the parish of the intention to petition Parliament for leave to submit a bill. The interested parties promoting the bill signed the petition (see

¹¹⁷ Young, 1808, 98; The passing of the General Inclosure Act in 1801 was expected to reduce this by creating a template on which future acts could be based. However, it is uncertain that the act had much impact on cost of enclosure.

¹¹⁸ BRO D/EEI E8; BRO D/ED E13A

¹¹⁹ Young, 1808, 98

¹²⁰ BRO D/EBY E19/2; Wordie 62-3

¹²¹ BRO D/EEI E8; BRO D/ED E13A

¹¹⁶ MERL BERKS 43/1/5

appendix I). At Wantage and Grove twenty-nine owner signed the petition; at Letcombe Regis and East Challow twenty-three petitioned; at West Challow there were ten signatories and at Ardington nine. The East Lockinge and Charlton awards do not provide details of the petitioners. However, an unsuccessful petition from East Lockinge had only one signature, that of John Pollexfen Bastard.¹²²

The desire of a major landowner to enclose was not always enough to get a bill through Parliament. Before their successful enclosure acts were passed, owners from Letcombe Regis, East Challow, Wantage and Grove and East Locking petitioned Parliament and then, for no stated reason, failed to bring in a bill (see Appendix II). The efforts to enclose the parish of East Lockinge are particularly interesting. From the time he began to build his estate in the Lockinge area, Matthew Wymondsold intended to enclose.¹²³ However, he so alienated the Rector of East Lockinge, who also happened to be the Warden of All Soul's College, Oxford, that his efforts were continuously thwarted. In 1778, after his death, his widow along with the rector and others in the parish petitioned for a bill. Again in both 1811 and 1812, his widow's second husband, John Pollexfen Bastard, first with others and then alone petitioned Parliament. None of the petitions were 'proceeded in'. It would seem that in each case the question of how to compensate for the tithes was a major, and apparently insoluble, problem until in the 1840s when the commutation of the tithes finally resolved this contentious issue.

Before the General Inclosure Act of 1801, drafting an enclosure bill was technically difficult; failure to comply with the standing orders of Parliament could delay the proceedings and increase cost. The 1801 act facilitated enclosure by setting out clauses that would be acceptable and thereby providing a template for each private act. It was essential to comply with the Standing Orders of the House. At West Challow, for example, public notice of the intention to petition Parliament was not given, possibly because there was general agreement about the enclosure. On presentation of the petition it was ordered that the matter should be examined further.¹²⁴ The committee found 'that the Standing Orders of the House of Commons, relative to the Bills of Inclosure, had not been complied with'.¹²⁵ However, they decided that

since 'it appeared to the Committee, that all the Parties interested in the Lands intended to be inclosed are consenting thereto', more time would be allowed to give the necessary notice.¹²⁶ Notice was then read on three consecutive Sundays in the parish church at Letcombe Regis and the chapel at West Challow. Leave was given to bring in the bill.¹²⁷ Anyone opposed to the bill could submit a counter-petition that would be heard by the committee. This occurred during the passing of the act for Ardington. John Pollexfen Bastard appears to have had some last minute reservations about the bill. His agent submitted a counter-petition. However, there is no evidence of him taking the matter further, and the bill resumed its course through Parliament. Once approved by the committee, the bill was presented to Parliament where it received its first and second, and third readings, was agreed by the House of Lords, and, finally, received Royal Assent (see Appendix II).

The acts for West Challow, Letcombe Regis and East Challow, Wantage and Grove, and Ardington were all passed under the General Inclosure Act of 1801. While this act facilitated the process of enclosure, it did not eliminate the need for a separate act for each enclosure. In 1836 an act for facilitating the enclosure of the open arable fields was passed. A further act in 1840 widened the scope of the 1836 act to include land other than arable. These acts made it possible, if there were agreement of two-thirds in number and value of the proprietors, to appoint enclosure commissioners to act without going through Parliament. If seven-eighths agreed, the proprietors could dispense with the services of the commissioners altogether.¹²⁸ Another general enclosure act was passed in 1845 further simplified the procedure for obtaining an act. A standing Enclosure Commission was set up which, in turn, appointed assistant commissioners who undertook the work of enclosure.¹²⁹ Both East Lockinge and Charlton were enclosed under this act.

The Choice and Nature of the Enclosure Commissioners

¹²⁶ *Journal of the House of Commons*, LVII, 212

¹²⁷ *Journal of the House of Commons*, LVII, 229; 354

¹²⁸ 6&7 Wm IV c.115 (1836); 3&4 Vic. c.31 (1840); for a further discussion of the legislation see Tate, 1967, 129-37

¹²⁹ Tate and Turner, 31-2

¹²² *Journal of the House of Commons*, LXVII, 69

¹²³ Havinden, 1999, 7

¹²⁴ *Journal of the House of Commons*, LVII, 150

¹²⁵ *Journal of the House of Commons*, LVII, 212

Table 4.1 Commissioners acting in three or more Enclosure Awards in Berkshire

Commissioner	Residence	Number of Enclosures	Dates of Activity	Observations and other involvement
Davis, John*	Bloxham, Oxon	34	1795-1818	served as umpire
Barnes, George	Andover, Hants	21	1801-29	served as umpire and surveyor
Bushnell, William	Aston Tirrold, Berks	16	1800-14	served as umpire
Davis, Richard	Lewkorn	11	1786-1813	served as umpire; removed due to illness; died 1814
Smallpiece, George	Nr Guilford, Surrey	8	1807-20	served as umpire
Crabtree, Richard	Wokingham, Berks	8	1813-27	
Dixon, Henry	Oxford, Oxon	7	1810-52	
Lousley, Daniel	Blewbury, Berks	7	1836-43	
Trumper, John	Harefield, Middlesex	7	1802-14	served as umpire; died before completion of award
Watts, John	Sulgrave, N'ants	7	1771-80	
Wood, William	Brenhill, Wilts	6	1845-64	
Bryan				
Allin, John	East Hendred, Berks	5	1801-12	
Browne, Thomas	Cowley, Gloucs	5	1771-77	
Nockolds, Martin	Tring, Herts	5	1803-32	
Washbourne, Thomas E.	Westminster	5	1836-53	removed due to illness
Burton, Francis	Aynhoe, N'ants	4	1772-77	died before completion of award
Chapman, Thomas	Richmond Surrey & Middle Temple, London	4	1814-27	
Richardson, Richard	Lincoln's Inn Field	4	1801-15	served as umpire
Brothers, John	Wykin, Warks	3	1770-78	
Driver, Edward	Whitehall, Westminster	3	1814-60	died before completion of award
Fuller, William	Caversham, Berks	3	1855-68	
Henry				
Hawkes, Francis	Reading, Berks	3	1845-58	
King, James*	Daventry, N'ants	3	1777-80	
Pinnell, John	Woolastone, Glos	3	1776-94	
Slade, John	Aston Upthorpe, Berks	3	1811-29	served as umpire
Stephens, John	Farnborough, Berks	3	1758-80	
Trinder, Daniel	Cirencester, Glos	3	1825-43	

* Two men of this named worked as commissioners in Berkshire

Source: *Catalogue of Enclosures*, BRO

One of the most important decisions the proprietors had to make was who would represent them during the enclosure process. These men, variously termed arbitrators, referees, valuers, but most often commissioners, were, in fact, the architects of the post-enclosure landscape. Their powers were immense. Arthur Young called them 'a sort of despotic monarch; into whose hands the property of a parish is invested, to recast and distribute it among the proprietors; and in many cases without appeal.'¹³⁰ Amongst their duties were the tasks of establishing the boundaries of the parish,

determining the validity of each claim for an allotment of land at enclosure, assessing the quality of land in the parish, allocating land to each successful claimant, and establishing roads, bridleways, and footpaths. During the process of enclosure they took on the task of regulating the farming to ensure that land to be exchanged was not neglected or over-cropped. Selecting the right men for the task was important. So who were these men and what skills did they bring to the process?

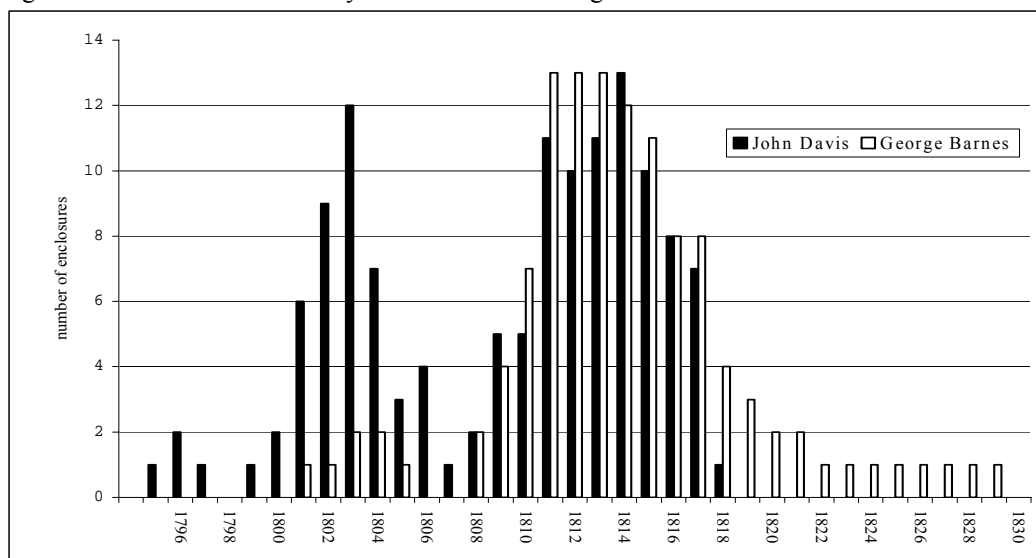
Initially enclosure commissioners were closely associated with the enclosure. In 1736 at Inkpen and Kintbury there were three

¹³⁰ Young, 1808, 61

commissioners, Edward Hanson, gentleman of Hungerford, Roger Geater, yeoman of Kintbury, and Simon Rawlins, yeoman of Avingdon. All of these men lived locally. Because the act was simply a confirmation of an earlier enclosure and the enclosure was not controversial, only three referees were used. When a new enclosure was involved, it was normal for more commissioners, each representing the interests of an individual or a small group, to be named. Over time, if an interested party did not name someone known to him personally, he might use someone recommended to him from an earlier enclosure. By the 1770s commissioners had developed considerable expertise and were invited to act over a wide area. Thus in 1772 at Letcombe Bassett and Childrey, five commissioners – Francis Burton, gentleman of Aynhoe, Northamptonshire, Thomas Browne, gentleman, of Cowley, Gloucestershire, John Watts, gentleman, of Sulgrave, Northamptonshire, and William Freeman, gentleman, of North Kilworth in Leicestershire, and John Stephens, the only local man from the nearby parish of Farnborough, were named. William Freeman died in 1772 and was replaced by Thomas Harrison, gentleman, of Stoney Stratford, Buckinghamshire. Of these men Watts from Northamptonshire served on seven enclosures in Berkshire, Browne from Gloucestershire acted on five, Burton from Northamptonshire on four, and Freeman from Leicestershire on two (see table 4.1).

With the passage of time the number of commissioners was reduced. Using a large number of referees helped to ensure that, within the limits of the procedure, a fair and unbiased enclosure took place. However, it was cumbersome. From 1774 a series of parliamentary standing orders were introduced to ensure greater equity and fairness in the proceedings.¹³¹ Increasingly the enclosure committee was composed of three men (no women are on record as having acted in this capacity in Berkshire), one selected by the Lord of the Manor, one by the holder of the tithes, and a third by all other proprietors. This could, and did, vary. At Letcombe Regis and East Challow in 1801, the Dean and Chapter of Westminster and their lessee Exuperius Turnor as Lord of the Manor selected William Bushnell of Aston Tirrold, and the other proprietors selected John Davis of Bloxham, Oxfordshire, and John Allin of East Hendred. At Ardington, John Davis was selected by William Wiseman Clarke, as the Lord of the Manor, and George Barnes by John Pollexfen Bastard and the other proprietors. If two commissioners were appointed and disputes arose, a third person could be appointed umpire. Where there was no anticipated problem with allocation of the land, only one commissioner was named. Thus in the Milton act in 1809 John Davis was the only commissioner and at Basildon in the same year William Bushnell was selected by all involved. While the men were chosen to safeguard the interests of one person

Fig 4.1 Enclosures worked on by John Davis and George Barnes in Berkshire



NB The dates worked are the period between act and award. The commissioner could be engaged in the period before and act and had not necessarily completed the work once the award was made. Source: BRO Catalogue of Inclosures

¹³¹ Tate, 1967, 129

or group, each swore an oath.¹³² The 1801 General Inclosure Act suggested the following:

I A.B. do swear, that I will faithfully, impartially, and honestly according to the best of my Skill and Ability, execute and perform the several Trusts, Powers, and Authorities vested and reposed in me as a Commissioner by the virtue of an Act for (Title of Act), according the Equity and good Conscience, and without Favour or Affection, Prejudice or Partiality to any Person or Persons whomsoever.¹³³

The office of enclosure commissioner was increasingly filled by men, often farmers or surveyors, who were turning the supervision of enclosure into a profession.¹³⁴ Of the 113 commissioners named in known enclosure acts in Berkshire, 29 men were used for more than two enclosures of whom John Davis of Bloxham near Banbury was the most active (Table 4.1).¹³⁵ Between 1797 and 1817 he was a commissioner for 34 awards, including those at West Challow, Letcombe Regis and East Challow, Wantage and Grove, and Ardington. He also acted as umpire on three occasions. Along side his work as a commissioner he was a farmer on a mixed farm of about 400 acres in Oxfordshire.¹³⁶ George Barnes of Andover, Hampshire was the second most active commissioner in the county. By training, he was a land surveyor. On nine occasions, including the enclosures in West Challow and Ardington, he worked with John Davis. Between 1802 and 1829 he was a commissioner 21 times, umpire twice and surveyor twice. Both men served as commissioners in other parts of England. John Davis' service as a commissioner took him all over southern and central England including work in Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Gloucestershire, Huntingdonshire, Leicestershire, Northamptonshire, and Oxfordshire. In total he served on 101 enclosure commissions. George Barnes was particularly active in his native county of Hampshire where he worked on twenty-five enclosures. He also was a commissioner in Buckinghamshire, Dorset, Gloucestershire, Oxfordshire, and Wiltshire. In total he worked on sixty-two

commissions.¹³⁷ In many years each served on a number of concurrent commissions. In Berkshire alone John Davis worked on twelve commissions in 1803 and eleven in 1811. In 1810, 1811, and 1812 George Barnes served on thirteen commissions (see figure 4.1).

Cost was probably the main reason for limiting the size of the commission. At Ardington William Wiseman Clarke and John Pollexfen Bastard agreed to select only two commissioners specifically in order to save on the cost. The remaining proprietors agreed and the name of Mr Parson was taken off the commission.¹³⁸ Work as a commissioner could be very lucrative. John Burcham of Coningsby, Lincolnshire acted as an enclosure commissioner at least sixty-nine times between 1801 and 1840. When he died in 1841 he left £600,000 in his will.¹³⁹ John Davis justified his absence at meetings as a means of saving on expenses. However he was reputed to have been contentious about representing the interests of the person who had appointed him and he did make it a policy to attend whenever those interests were involved. On occasion his absence and caused problems. During the Ardington proceedings, Mr James Hall as representative for the Trustees of Lambourn Almshouse claimed expenses for attending enclosure meetings that had to be abandoned because no commissioners were present.¹⁴⁰ Evidence from the minutes kept by the commissioners at Letcombe Regis shows that there was no quorum on at least five occasions. On each occasion John Davis was absent (see Appendix III).

The Work of the Commissioners

Once the act was obtained and the commissioners selected, the real work could begin. The precise range of their activities was determined by the specific private act. Generally, however, their work followed a well-established pattern. At the first meeting the commissioners were sworn in, the clerks, surveyor, and bankers were appointed. About the same time the parish was viewed so the course of husbandry could be determined. This was essential to ensure a smooth transition between open field husbandry and farming in severalty. When the decision to enclose was taken, the farmer no longer had a stake in the

¹³² Tate, 1967, 109-10

¹³³ 41 Geo. III c.109 (1801)

¹³⁴ Tate, 1967 108-9

¹³⁵ There were at least five commissioners named John Davis, several were related, working as enclosure commissioners. Information supplied by John Chapman

¹³⁶ Young, 1813, 93-5; Turner, 1971, 175-7; Turner, 1977, 127-8

¹³⁷ Information supplied by Dr John Chapman

¹³⁸ BRO D/QI C14

¹³⁹ Tate, 1967, 112

¹⁴⁰ BRO D/QI C14

land he was farming. Contemporary agriculturalist and advocate of enclosure, Arthur Young, explained the mentality of the farmer during this difficult time:

From the first starting the project of an enclosure act to the final award, has, in numerous cases, taken two, three, four, and even five or six years; their management is deranged; not knowing where their future lands will be allotted, they save all their dung till much of it is good for little; they perform all operations of tillage with inferior attention; perhaps the fields are cross cropped and exhausted, and not well recovered under a course of years.¹⁴¹

In order to curb the worst excesses, the enclosure commissioners were given control of agriculture during the period between the act and the award. The following notice giving typical directions for agriculture at West Challow appeared in the *Reading Mercury* on 20 September 1802:

The Commissioners do hereby direct that the lands within the above Hamlet, lately planted with a hitching crop, and which shall come in course to be planted with wheat, in the ensuing season, shall be forthwith ploughed in an husbandlike manner, by the respective occupiers thereof.¹⁴²

The General Inclosure Act of 1845 included fines that could be imposed on farmers failing to comply with the commissioners' orders. There could be a fine of £5 per acre for cross-cropping or withholding manure, and a £10 fine for each of any of the other specified offences.¹⁴³ To minimise the disruption, holdings could be allocated before the award was executed. At Letcombe Regis and East Challow, some allotments were set out to make it possible for the proprietors to plough in late October 1802. On 5 April 1803 notice was given that rights of common ceased and the land was 'divided, allotted, laid in severalty, and inclosed'. The award was not executed until 5 October of that year (see Appendix III)

After the smooth running of the agricultural calendar was assured and the people involved to run the enclosure appointed and sworn, the task of allocating land could be started. Two surveys had to be made. The first was a simple plan of the land to be enclosed along with any old or 'ancient' enclosed land that was to be exchanged. If there were any doubts about the location of parochial boundaries, a meeting was called to perambulate the boundaries and notice

¹⁴¹ Young, 1808, 31

¹⁴² *Reading Mercury*, 20/9/1802

¹⁴³ 8&9 Vic., c.118, (1845)

was sent to all relevant churches and chapels. The second survey was made to determine the value, condition, and potential of the land to be divided.¹⁴⁴ Henry Homer, writing on the division of land at the time of enclosure in the mid-eighteenth century explained the process:

There should be a critical examination of the soil, as well as of the herbage which it produced, an enquiry into its latent qualities, whether it contains anything noxious to any species of profitable cattle? Whether particular seasons are not adapted to it, and how far it is affected by the present? What management it had been under for a course of years past, and the like? To these should be added a due regard to its situation for convenience; a consideration of the different expense of inclosing according to its greater or less intrinsic value.¹⁴⁵

The valuation was particularly important in areas of long narrow parishes like those extending from the Vale of the White Horse up on to the Downs. Not only was there the variation from the heavy clays of the north to the thin chalks of the south, but there was also variation east to west. The parishes of Ardington and East Locking had a greater proportion of good quality loam than Letcombe Regis and Wantage.¹⁴⁶ The tithe commissioner inspecting the parish of Ardington found 'so considerable a variety of soil that I could not feel confident in any estimate I might make without the means of forming an accurate notion of the respective extent of the various soils.'¹⁴⁷ Again in Ardington, an assessment of the varying quality of land on the Lambourn Almshouses Estate found that the rent of the best arable was more than the meadowland but that the worst was valued at only about 60 per cent of the best.¹⁴⁸ Such variety made the allocation of land in the area particularly difficult. The presence of a local commissioner like John Allin of East Hendred to compliment the experience of John Davis and George Barnes can only have facilitated this part of the Letcombe Regis enclosure.

Once the enclosure commissioners knew both the quantity and quality of the land available, they could begin the task of redistributing the land in the open fields,

¹⁴⁴ For a more detailed account of the valuation process and the decisions resulting from it see Gonner, 77-82

¹⁴⁵ Homer, 48-9

¹⁴⁶ PRO IR18/ 13196 & 13096

¹⁴⁷ PRO IR18/ 13096

¹⁴⁸ BRO D/QI C14

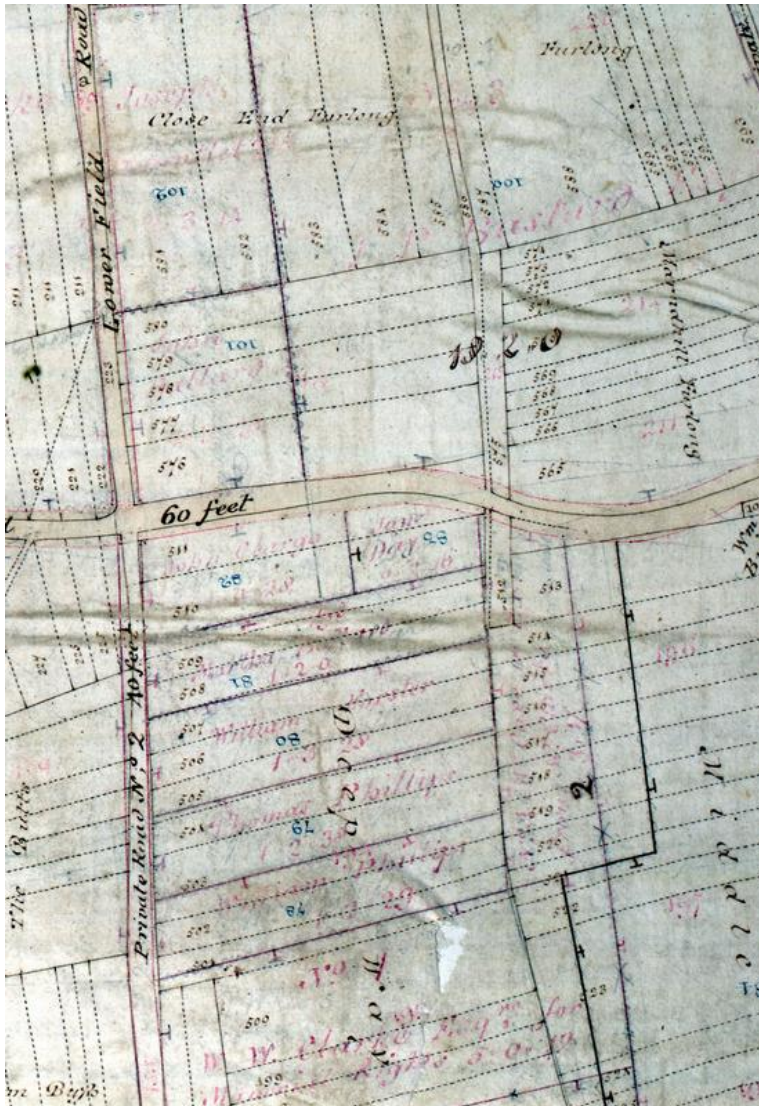


Fig 4.2 This working enclosure map of Ardington illustrates the main tasks of the enclosure commissioners. First they had to locate and identify the owners of the common land (black dotted lines) and any ancient enclosures. Once this was complete, roads could be widened and straightened and new roads plotted. Finally the new allocations of land (black solid lines with the proprietors named in red) were drawn. Responsibility for fencing the land was indicated by a T on the boundary.

Source: BRO D/EI. P1

meadows, wastes, and commons (see fig. 4.2). This was done in three stages. First to be marked out were the roads, footpaths, and bridleways, the village gravel and chalk pits needed to make and maintain the roads, drainage work that was of benefit to the community as a whole, allocations for the poor, and so forth. The second allocation was to compensate those holding abstract rights in the parish – the lord of the manor for loss of his ownership on the soil of the waste and common and, the tithe owner if, as in West Challow the tithe was to be commuted as part of the enclosure. The remaining claimants formed the third group to be allocated

land. Within this group the General Inclosure Act of 1801 directed that commissioners should have 'particular regard for the Convenience of the Owners of Proprietors of the smallest Estates'.¹⁴⁹

The examination of claims went on throughout the other work of the commissioners. At Letcombe Regis and East Challow, for example, the first meeting was on 28 July 1801, claims were invited from 13 September of that year. Various complaints continued to be heard until early in 1804. The award was executed on 6 October 1804 (see Appendix III). For the other parishes it is a safe assumption that the long gaps that often occurred between the newspaper announcements were filled examining claims and setting out allotments. The task of examining the claims was laborious and often complex. Each person submitted a statement of the area held in the open fields and in the meadow along with the right to common associated with their holding along with the type of tenure under which the land was held. If they had supporting documentation, this too was produced. A particularly detailed minute book kept at Great Shefford illustrates the problems that the commissioners faced when dealing with claims. The Lord of the Manor, the Marquis of

Downshire, owned most of the land in the parish. His agent objected to a number of the claims submitted by others in the parish. Generally the objections related to the number of animals that could be grazed on common land in the parish. Hannah and Catherine Westbury held several acres of copyhold land belonging to the Marquis of Downshire. They also occupied a holding of unspecified tenure (but most likely to have been a leasehold or let at a rack rent) containing 33 acres 1 rood 4 perches in the North and South Fields. This had been

¹⁴⁹ 41 Geo. III c.109 (1801)

purchased by the Marquis of Downshire, possibly in an effort to further consolidate his estate, shortly before the enclosure began. The claim by the sisters to the commissioners was for a copyhold of 1½ acres in the North Field, the same amount in the South Field together with the right of common for one cow and an unspecified number of sheep. The agent to the Marquis of Downshire objected. He noted that only 2 acres 1 rood and 22 perches were held by the Westbury sisters, and, as a consequence, only rights to ‘one half cow common on the downs and the commons in the fields according to the quantity in respect of other lands having right of common therein’ was associated with the holding. Catherine Westbury then conceded that the former custom was to allow one cow on the Downs in every year but that under the present stint she was limited to a cow every other year. However, she also noted, somewhat belatedly, that she was the tenant on another holding that contained 40 acres in the open fields to which belonged common grazing on the downs for 4 cows and, she believed, 40 sheep. Her brother, before his death had stocked sheep on the breach of the common fields but that she had not done so and, although she considered that she retained the right, she did not know the number permitted. She produced both documentary evidence and witnesses to substantiate her claim. One witness testified that two years earlier in 1810 the Westburys had grazed two milch cows and a heifer on the down and in 1811 one milch cow, one barren cow, and one horse. Other witnesses, including a brother living in another parish, provided further evidence. The evidence of the manor hayward supported the Marquis of Downshire. Although the outcome of the claim and counter-claim was not recorded, when the allocation was announced, Catherine ‘expressed herself satisfied with her allotment’. She did ask that her allotment ‘be laid in the South Field adjoining and in front the House belonging to her Holding.’ In the award of 1818, Hannah Westbury received 2 acres and 24 perches adjacent to her homestead in the South Field. No mention was made of the larger holding which, unless copyhold, may have been recorded as part of the allocation to the Marquis of Downshire. It is also possible that Hannah, by this time the only remaining name on the copyhold tenancy, had only the smaller holding.¹⁵⁰

Although the survival of claims is unusual, the Hedge Family Estate records include a claim for 29½ acres of arable land, 4 acres of meadow

¹⁵⁰ BRO D/ED E13A

and common pasture for one cow and an indefinite number of sheep and a counter-claim objecting to the claim for the flock made in the 1868 enclosure at Charlton.¹⁵¹ At least one and sometimes several printed abstracts of the claims were circulated and objections or counterclaims invited. Because the failure to object to a controversial claim might require court action to reverse, these claim abstracts have survived in estate and solicitors collections. One such abstract from the Letcombe Regis and East Challow enclosure has a hand-written note at the bottom:

Sir, You are requested to inspect the Abstract and if you have any objection to and of the claims you are desired to attend and make the same to the Commissioner on Friday the 28th day of May next at the King’s Head Inn in Wantage at eleven o’clock in the forenoon. I am sir your h[onour]able serv[ant] Jn Barr, Wantage April 3 1802.¹⁵²

Such vigilance by the owners was essential. At Ardington, the claim made by the Rev. Richard Coxe was published in an abstract from January 1811. He claimed:

Several parcels of Arable Meadow and Pasture Land situate lying and being in The Common Fields of Ardington containing together by Computation 118 A[cres] in the occupation of John Clargo.

Also commons for twelve horses 18 cows 6 calves and 180 sheep in all the commons and commonable places of Ardington

Also commons for 141 sheep on the Downs called Wether Down with William Wiseman Clarke, esq.¹⁵³

This land was actually leased from the trustees of the Lambourn Almshouses and should have been claimed as such in conjunction with the charity. While it was not in the remit of the commissioners to determine title to land, the matter appears to have been brought to the attention of the charity by John Davis, selected to act as commissioner not by the ‘other proprietors’, but instead by William Wiseman Clarke. The allegation that Coxe had falsified the claim was denied but evidence from the Abstract would seem to support it. Without the attention to detail paid by John Davis, the lack of vigilance by the charity could have resulted in them having to go to court to reclaim the land. After the experience, they appointed James Hall to act as their agent for the land in Ardington.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵¹ BRO D/EH E24

¹⁵² BRO D/EEI E9

¹⁵³ BRO D/QI E10

¹⁵⁴ BRO D/QI C14

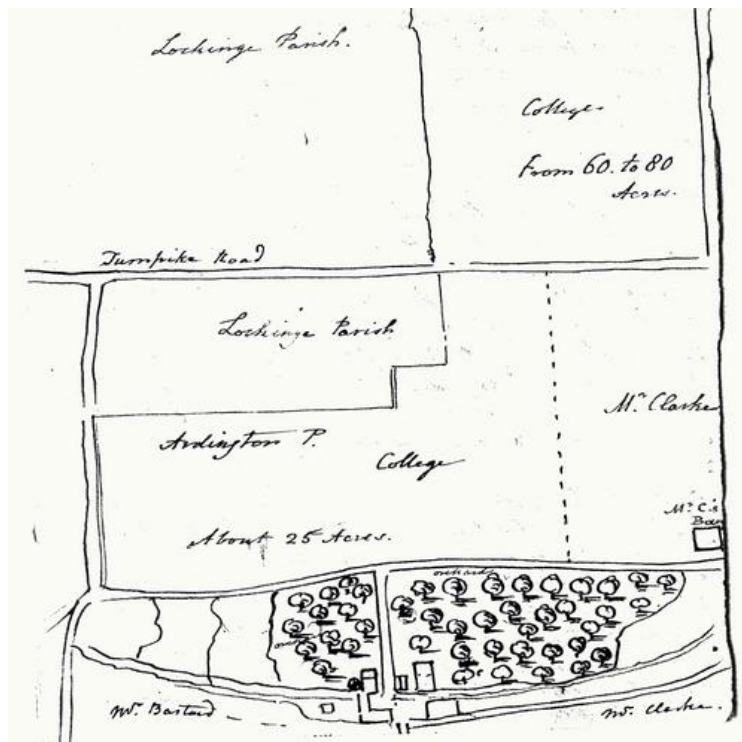


Fig. 4.3 The remit of the enclosure commissioners was to create consolidated holdings located conveniently near to the land owned in the village. The trustees of Lambourn Almshouses produced this sketch map of the land they desired. Unfortunately the allocation to the two principal owners made this allocation impossible.

Source: BRO D/QI C14

When allocating land the commissioners were charged with creating consolidated, convenient, and economically viable holdings. They had wide powers to determine the distribution of the land, but there were several things that they had to consider. Each claimant was invited to submit the desired location of land for his or her allotment, and as far as possible they took this into account. They were limited by the clauses in the act. This might require the commissioners to redistribute old enclosed land or to allocate land in lieu of tithe payments. The commissioners had to keep the enclosure and its consequences as inexpensive as possible. Where it was feasible holdings were placed near the homestead in the village.¹⁵⁵ This was not always possible to achieve. In principle, each proprietor was given an allocation of each type of land – arable, meadow, and common and waste. Because the land in the long narrow parishes around Wantage varied from the north to the south, it was particularly difficult to include all areas in a consolidated allocation. Whenever possible the smaller holdings were located near the homestead of the claimant. The

¹⁵⁵ Yelling 135

holdings of the larger proprietors were then arranged around the smaller enclosures. They were rarely in a single unit. Generally each person received an allotment of arable and another in the meadow. Because of its inferior quality, downland tended to be distributed amongst the larger proprietors.

As far as possible the commissioners met the requests for land from the smaller claimants before those for whom consolidation and convenience were less important. This could not always be done. Again at Ardington, James Hall, the agent appointed by the Lambourn Almshouses, was frustrated in his efforts to obtain the land he felt best suited the interests of the charity. The estate belonging to the almshouses was centred on a mill and several orchards on the southwest side of the village. Ideally, the about 25

acres of land for their enclosed holding would have been located in the West Field (immediately north of the orchard in the sketch map – fig. 4.3) or in the Upper Field (immediately south) and a further 60 to 80 acres in the Lower Field (across the turnpike). Unfortunately, this arrangement was not possible. Under an unusual clause in the Ardington Act, John Pollexfen Bastard and William Wiseman Clarke had already secured Upper Field for themselves. Clarke also claimed the West Field as an old enclosure not to be allocated. James Hall produced several aged residents of the village who gave evidence that the Upper West Field and the Lower West Field had been fed several times with common stock at the breach of the field within the last 20 years. However, the commissioners decided that this right was not regularly exercised so they were bound to take the field as being land in severalty.¹⁵⁶

A second problem for the Trustees was the exchange of old enclosed land to be made between land belonging to the Lambourn

¹⁵⁶ BRO D/QI C14

Almshouses and William Wiseman Clarke. As with the allocation of the communal land, the power of the commissioners to force the exchange could be extensive. At Letcombe Regis, for example, their say was final. At Ardington, the act provided for recourse to court if an owner was particularly dissatisfied, but this would increase the cost of the enclosure. The exchange between the trustees for the Lambourn Almshouses charity and Clarke was for Great and Little Jiggers, 2.76 acres of riverside meadow and for 1.86 acres of arable land in the Lower Field belonging to William Clarke. The Trustees were not surprisingly dissatisfied with the exchange. In a memo of 23 January 1811 James Hall noted:

I went to Wantage to represent the inadequacy of the exchange of arable land for Jiggers, I was told it could not be remedied and was in the commissioners estimation right as it stood; and that Mr Clarke had been there the day before saying that in his mind the exchange was fair and reasonable, whereas on Monday, he told me there were 5 acres given for the Jiggers...¹⁵⁷

The Trustees could not approve of the exchange and Hall was asked to meet with the commissioners again. At this meeting and George Barnes acknowledged the mistake and promised to alter it. The area in the arable field was increased by an acre to 2.86 acres. This was contiguous with the other arable land allocated to the charity and, on Hall's recommendation, it was accepted by the Trustees.¹⁵⁸ The land

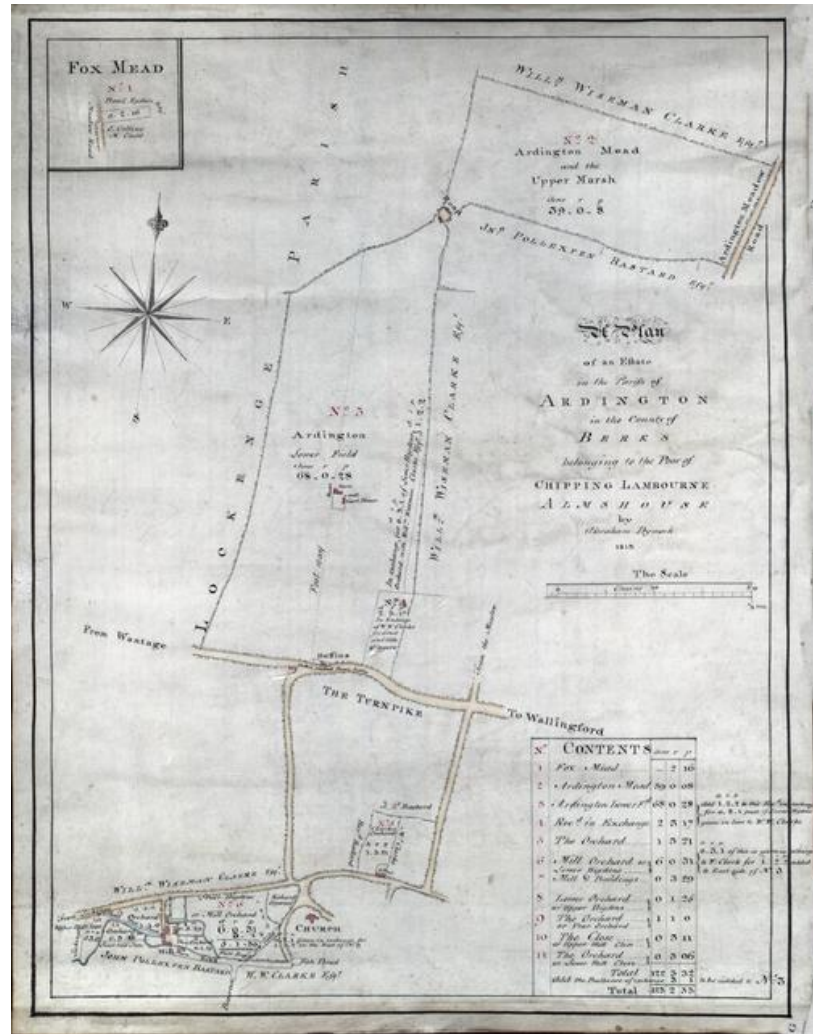


Fig. 4.4 The Post-Enclosure Lambourn Almshouses Estate in Ardington shows the compromise made by the trustees of the Lambourn Almshouses. although in principle the needs of the smaller landowners were to be met first, at Ardington special clauses in the act along with an earlier contested enclosure limited their choice. The land allocated was less compact and convenient than would have been the ideal.

Source: BRO D/QI P3

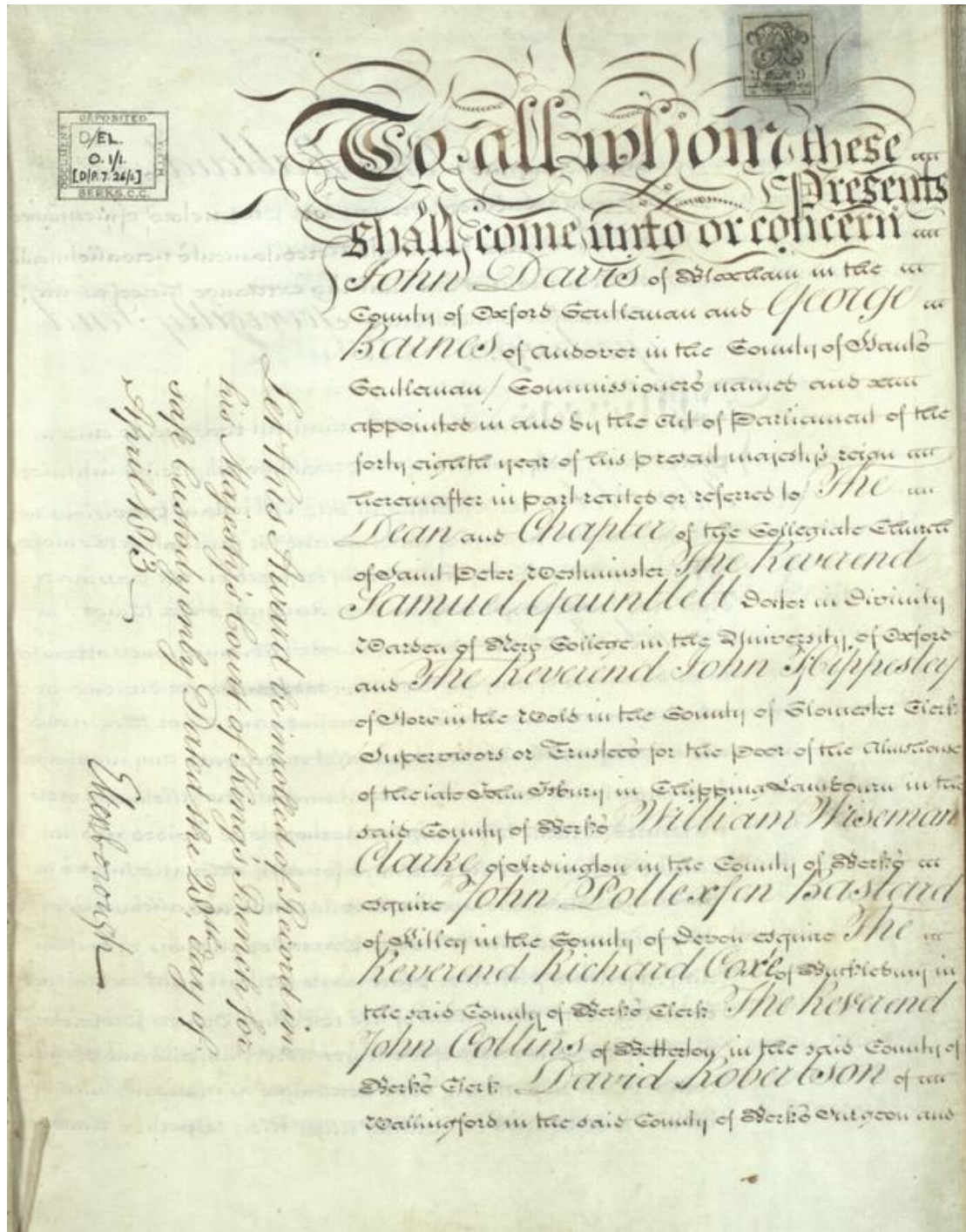
awarded to Richard Coxe, Lessee of Lambourn Almshouse was essentially that requested. It consisted of 68a.0r.28p in the Lower Field, 39a 0r 8p in Upper Marsh and Meadow, 2r 16p in Ardington Meadow, and an exchange with William Wiseman Clarke for 2a 3r 17p in the Lower Field.¹⁵⁹ These are shown on a slightly later map of the Lambourn Almshouse Estate (see fig 4.4)

After the complexities of dividing and allocating the land in a parish had been resolved, a draft award was eventually made available for

¹⁵⁷ BRO D/QI C14
¹⁵⁸ BRO D/QI C14

¹⁵⁹ BRO D/EL/O1/1

inspection. Minor alterations to claims and private roads and paths were made. Finally the award was executed and deposited (see fig. 4.5). Although the commissioners continued to be involved with financial matters concerning the enclosure, it was essentially complete. The land of the parish was now farmed in severalty. In their work enclosing the parish, the commissioners had remodelled the countryside.



John Davis, George Barnes and the others were, in reality, the architects of the post-enclosure landscape.

Chapter 5

The Landscape of Parliamentary Enclosure

What would an ideal enclosed landscape look like? This question had occupied agricultural writers and theorists for centuries.¹⁶⁰ The location and nature of the parish had a major influence on how near the ideal an enclosure could be. In 1653, for example, an idealised plan for an estate contained square holdings of mixed sizes conveniently arranged for access and draining and for the economically efficient provision of fencing and labour (see fig. 5.1).¹⁶¹ There were many advantages to such a layout.

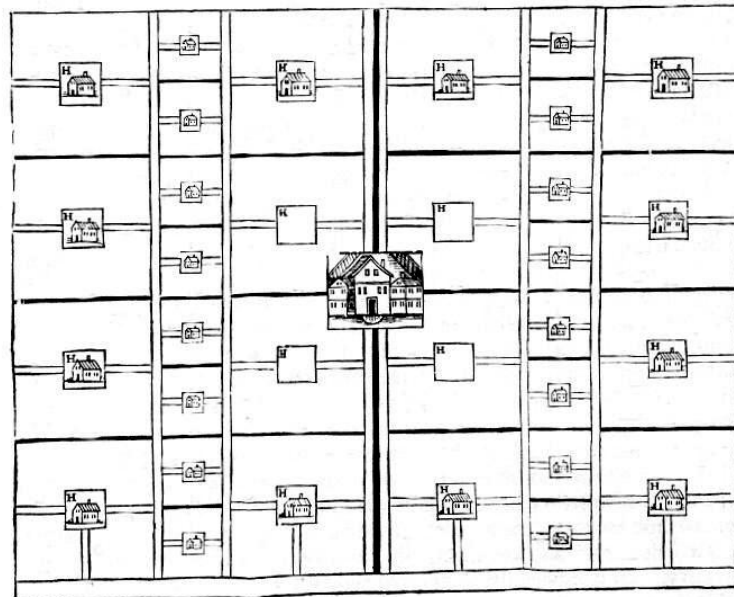


Fig. 5.1 The idealised enclosure landscape as envisioned by Dymock in the seventeenth century. Fencing, drainage and road making were economical and the location of smallholdings close to the larger farms provided convenient labour. However, it necessitated building new farms on each holding and it would not suit the long narrow parishes in the Wantage area with the wide variation of soils.

Source: Dymock, 1653

Each farm was compact with the homestead conveniently located at its centre. The square units were economical to fence and to drain. Each of the larger farms was able to draw on the labour of the neighbouring smallholders.

This scheme had several important disadvantages. It would have necessitated considerable expenditure on new buildings. More importantly, it was only suitable for a parish where there was uniformity of soil. In a parish of mixed soils land of different qualities was best suited to different uses – land near a river or stream was often used for meadow, arable land was that which was both fertile and readily ploughed throughout the year, the waste was often of little use for more than rough grazing. Other descriptions of the ideal layout of a parish envisioned enclosure taking the form of concentric rings radiating out from the village

Fig. 4.5 Enclosure Award for Ardington, 1811
Source: BRO D/EL/ 01/1

in the centre and including areas of arable, meadow, and pasture. Again, this ideal was rarely possible. Henry Homer believed this was the 'best Method which could be devised, both for Beauty and Convenience, as well as

Cheapness.'¹⁶² For the long narrow parishes typical of the downs a more pragmatic solution was necessary. These parishes were well suited to the scattered fields of open field, communal agriculture. In the four parishes with heavy clayland meadows in the north, fertile loam farmed as arable in the centre, and light, unimproved downland in the south, this was especially true. A holding of scattered strips could easily contain portions of each. An enclosed farm containing one compact piece of land could not. On the other hand Thomas Stone, another of those commissioned by the Board of Agriculture to write a general view of a

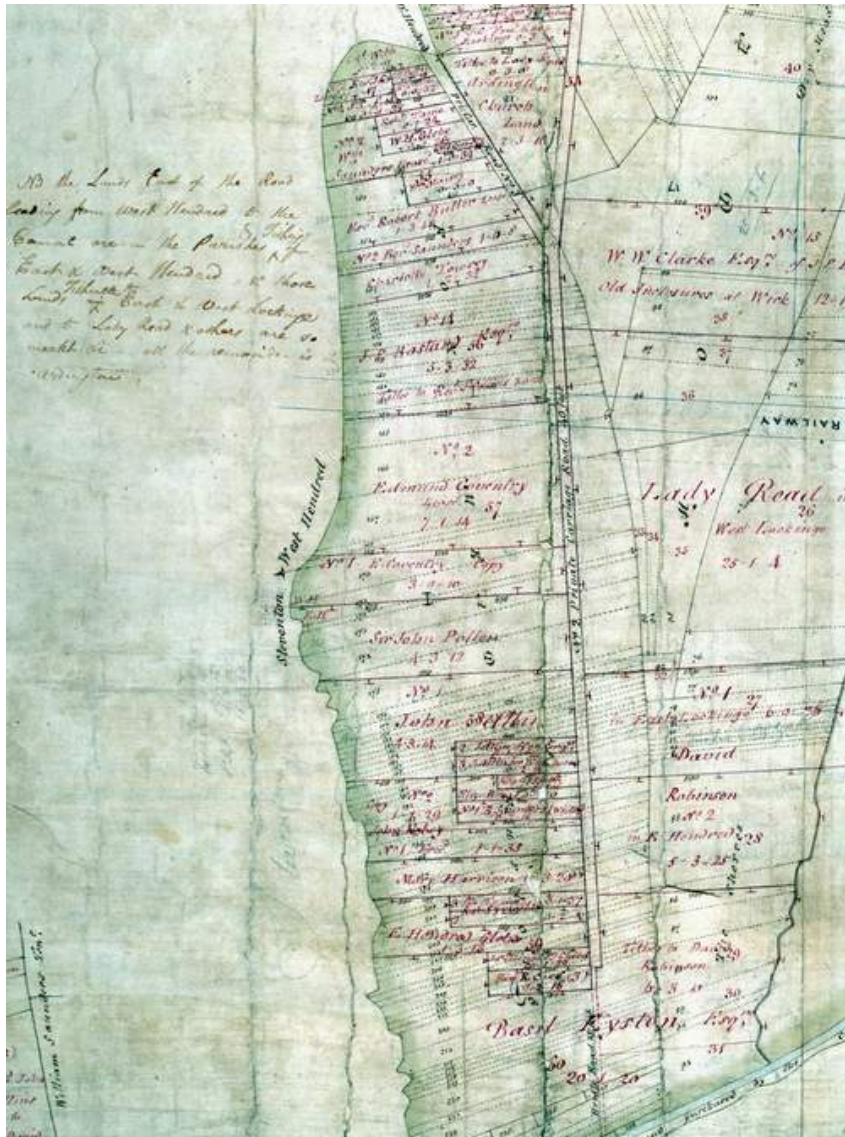
county's agriculture (i.e. Lincolnshire) noted that 'the more square the allotments are made, and the more central the buildings are placed, the more advantages are derived to the proprietors in every respect.'¹⁶³ The task of the enclosure commissioners was, in essence, to

¹⁶⁰ Yelling, 120-3, 134-8

¹⁶¹ Dymock, 9-10

¹⁶² Homer, 90-1

¹⁶³ Stone, 42-3



create a landscape of allotments that came as near as possible to these ideals. For the long narrow parishes extending from the Vale of the White Horse up to the Berkshire Downs this remit was difficult to meet. Figure 5.2 is an extract of Ardington Meadow from a working map of the enclosure commissioners at Ardington. It provides an insight into some of the principles followed by John Davis, George Barnes, and the others as they enclosed. Access to the allotments was to be by two newly created straight private roads. As much as possible, the allotments were then made to border the road in neat and economically efficient rectangular fields. The organisation of the old common meadowland was largely disregarded. Often however, the commissioners and their surveyors

Fig. 5.2 Working Enclosure Map of Ardington This extract from the parish shows several features of the newly created landscape. The road is Ardington Lane, a private road providing access to the allotments in Ardington Med. The allotments show no regard for the original layout of the common meadow. William Wiseman Clarke has been allocated a large allotment in the meadow. Beside it is the Middle Common, again allocated to Clarke and to the far right are several earlier enclosed fields. The 'T' marks along the boundaries indicate who has responsibility for planting and maintaining the hedge.

Source: BRO D/FI. P1

boundaries of the old enclosed fields until it reached the newly allotted land. It is often possible to identify the location and shape of the old open fields simply by locating the gentle S-shaped bend of an old strip in the layout of a road or field.

The Roads and Canal

The first feature that the enclosure commissioners laid down was the network of

did not start with blank sheet. Some features of the old landscape remained unchanged. When they were not amalgamated with new enclosures as a result of the parliamentary award, haphazard piecemeal enclosures remained and are often easily identifiable by their size and shape. The three fields known as Barwell Closes at the bottom centre of fig. 5.3 are typical of piecemeal enclosure of single reversed S-shaped lands in the old arable field. Many of the pre-enclosure roads were hedged but otherwise left to run in their original paths. The main roads shown on the map through the village of Grove remained unaltered at enclosure. West of the village (at the bottom of the map in fig. 5.3) is a road that followed the

Letcombe Regis, Wantage, East Lockinge, and Ardington. At sixty feet from hedge to hedge the road was consistently the widest public road, apart from the turnpikes, in the parish. The awards for West Challow, Letcombe Regis and East Challow, and Ardington specify that the road was, according to the awards, to remain in its 'present course'. Thus its modern course appears to be pretty much unaltered.¹⁶⁸ The width of the road is reminiscent of earlier parliamentary enclosures where sixty feet was a standard width for most major routes.¹⁶⁹ By the early nineteenth century this had been reduced to forty feet. It is possible that the use of the Ridgeway as a droveway across the downs was a deciding factor in its width. The other main route across the parishes was the Ickleton Road. It, like other well-travelled routes in the area, was forty feet wide and apart from being hedged, was left with little alteration at enclosure. Less important roads were between twenty and thirty feet from hedge to hedge. Bridleways were usually ten to fifteen feet wide and footpaths six. All were to be embanked and fenced within six months of the awards made under the 1801 General Act and twelve months at East Lockinge and Charlton under the General Inclosure Act of 1845.

Routes between villages before enclosure were often little more than pathways that



meandered across the open fields along the meers, balks, and headlands. Because there was

Fig. 5.4 Ardington Lane, Ardington is a typical enclosure road, looking more as it would have in the nineteenth century because today it is a bridleway and chalked. The road is 40 feet wide, ditched and hedged on both side and almost completely straight. The road with its verges was wide enough

¹⁶⁸ to allow various paths through when the road was wet and muddy. BRQ Q/RDC 21A; Q/RDC 89A; Q/RDC 82A; Q/RDC 67A

¹⁶⁹ Turner, 1984, 149-50; Emery, 142; Hoskins, 1967a, 98

no systematic planning, parishes had more roads than needed. One of the principal tasks of the enclosure commissioner was to rationalise this network. The old roads, bridleways, and footpaths were straightened, widened, closed off, or even left pretty much in their original state. New roads and paths were laid out. At Furzwick, on the downs above Wantage, the crossroad where the Ridgeway and Court Hill Road cross Manor Road was, before 1806, a junction of the Faringdon Road, the Lambourn Road, the Hungerford Road, and the Newbury Road. Just south of there the London Road, also called The Ridgeway branched off the Hungerford Road and met the Newbury road just slightly further east (fig. 3.5). Similar rationalisation of the roads occurred everywhere in the area. Public roads often either followed along parish, field, or furlong boundaries, or along the track of an older road, bridleway, or footpath. This has resulted in sharp right-angled bends where at the edges of ancient furlongs and gently bending roads following the backwards S-shape of the long sides of the strips. Where practical, the roads were straight. Many were a mixture. Upper Field Road in Ardington, for example was to be 40 feet wide and travel from 'Ardington at the Bridge westward for about 100 yards and then southwards into Ilkeston way and thence eastward along the Ilkeston way to the entrance of the present road or way leading over lands in Betterton and from the last mentioned Road over lands in Betterton at the northwest corner of Newbury Way Furlong into the Lockinge and Ginge road.' The Lockinge and Ginge Road was again 40 feet wide and went out of hamlet of Betterton in or near its present track into the hamlet of Ginge.

Ardington Lane is a typical enclosure road (see fig. 5.4). Today it is a bridleway and looks very much as it would have at the time of enclosure. This road, 'Private Carriageway No. 2' was 40 feet wide with hedges and ditches on either side. According to the award, its track was to go 'out of the Turnpike Road opposite Lower Field Road in the track of a former road to the meer usually called the Church Meer and along the said meer eastward for about 130 yards and then northwards over Bank Hedge Furlong to Whistler's Corner and from there to the corner of the homesteads called Mallams

and over Ardington Meadow to the entrance into the third allotment of the Rev Richard Coxe lessee of the Lambourn Almshouses'. The width of the road included the verges on either side to provide alternative routes along the road in times of bad weather and when the road was particularly worn. This was essential until the improvements in road surfacing that were introduced by men like John Metcalf and J.L. Macadam in the late eighteenth century, were more widely adopted in the second quarter of the nineteenth century. Until then, the roads remained medieval in form but, through far

become almost impassable during a wet season.¹⁷¹ The verge also provided feed for livestock. Where needed to help drainage, the ditches along the side of the roads in Ardington were to be four foot wide and two deep. These were essential along 'Private Carriageway No. 2' which ran through the heavy clays of Ardington Meadow. This road, because it was used for access to private land, was funded, hedged, and maintained by the people using it for access. The right to feed the verge of the private roads belonged the person responsible for maintaining that section of road. Public roads, but not always footpaths and bridleways, were built and maintained by the parish. In an effort to reduce costs of the enclosure as much as possible, enclosure roads were often straight and therefore shorter. This principle was often followed for making private roads since they tended to cut across a number of newly created holdings.



One manifestation of the changing attitude towards the land as property at enclosure with a visible impact on the landscape was the increased sense of ownership and with it a stronger notion of trespass. This found expression in the landscape in the newly created road network. In Letcombe Regis and the Challows, Wantage, Grove and Charlton, East Lockinge, and Ardington the enclosure commissioners created many public, and more significantly in terms of

greater traffic, were in a much worse condition.¹⁷⁰ Roads on both the chalks and the clays could

this increased sense of ownership, private roads and ways (see fig. 5.5). In the open fields access was simple. There were footpaths and bridleways marking the main routes across the arable fields and the meadows. In addition the fields were criss-crossed with meers and

Fig. 5.5 One of the important changes affecting the landscape was brought about by the rationalisation of the road network. Before enclosure the road system had grown organically. The result was many routes that were convenient but not essential. The extract taken from the enclosure map of Charlton shows some of the steps taken by the commissioners as they closed old routes and created new ones.
Source: BRO Q/RDC 67B

¹⁷⁰ Taylor, 1979, 160-1

¹⁷¹ Hoskins, 1967a 98,



Fig. 5.6 This chalk pit, the largest of the three in Wantage, was established to provide chalk for road building and maintenance. Today it is tree filled and has become something of a nature refuge.

balks which gave access to the strips in the field. Entrance into the commons and wastes was even less restricted. When the fields were in strips and grazing communal, there was very little emphasis placed on trespass. At enclosure this changed. The consolidation of holdings into individual allotments did away with the meers and balks and many of the footpaths and roads. New *private* roads were needed to replace the open access across the fields and allow admission to each individual holding.

Where it was to pass through the area, the enclosure commissioners were also responsible for allotting land for the building of the Wilts and Berks Canal. The canal, its towpaths, and the land needed for wharfs took precedence over other allocations in the hamlet of Grove. A forty-foot wide strip of land on either side of the proposed canal was allocated the canal company. The award noted that the owners of the land were to be compensated for its loss.¹⁷²

The need to build and maintain roads created another feature of the enclosure landscape, the gravel or chalk pit. Each award allotted land for this purpose. These were generally small and, because chalk was used for road building, they were often located on the downs. The one chalk pit in East Lockinge was three-quarters of an acre. In Ardington one pit of three-quarters of an acre was allotted on Wether Down. The provision for pits at Letcombe Regis was more generous. Two allotments, one of 3 acres 10 perches and a second of 1 rood 24 perches, were set aside for road repair. In Wantage there were three chalk pits located just of the Ridgeway on

the down. One was just over a third of an acre, the second was 1½ acre, and the third, 2 acres. The hamlet of Grove had no downland and therefore no source of chalk. The half-acre set aside for road maintenance was a gravel pit. The land around the pits was to be let out at the best rent obtainable and the income

supplemented the funds used by the highway surveyor to maintain the roads.¹⁷³ Today the chalk and gravel pits are often no longer used for road materials but instead have filled with water or are overgrown with trees and bushes to become nature reserves (fig. 5.6). On some occasions they have been reclaimed and, with uncertain legality, used for agriculture.¹⁷⁴

Allotments and Farms

Once the road network was complete, the land could be divided and allocated. Wherever possible the enclosure commissioners were expected to create a single, consolidated holding containing an area of meadow, arable, and pastureland conveniently located adjacent to the dwelling and the enclosed ground around it. Because of the variation in soil in the four long and narrow parishes around Wantage, this was rarely possible. In spite of this, in addition to their homesteads, most claimants were awarded single parcels. Of the proprietors in Letcombe Regis and East Challow, thirty-three received a single allocation of land. Twenty-one were meadow, eleven in the arable fields, and only one – the Dean and Chapter of Winchester and

¹⁷² BRO Q/RDC 67A

¹⁷³ BRO Q/RDC 21A; Q/RDC 89A; Q/RDC 82A; Q/RDC 67A

¹⁷⁴ Turner, 1984, 158



Fig 5.6 Although the enclosure commissioners could reduce the movement of farms out of the village by allocating land in single blocks adjacent to the homestead of the claimant, they were not compelled to do this as is shown in the extract from the Ardington award where the awards to the largest owners took precedence.

Thomas Goodlake their Lessee - on the downs. A further eighteen owners were allocated land in two blocks, six in three, five in four, and nine in five or more blocks. John Harley Drummond received thirteen allocations with a total of

slightly over 121 acres.¹⁷⁵ At Ardington thirty-one owners were given a single allocation in addition to their homestead. The majority of these were allocations of meadowland away from the village. Of the allotments for arable

¹⁷⁵ BRO Q/RDC 82A

land only one, made to Joseph Gauntlett, was adjacent to the homestead (located at 103-4 on fig. 5.6). Of the others, Jane Day, John Clargo, Richard Bartholomew, Thomas Phillips, and William Phillips do not appear to have owned a cottage or homestead in the village. Bernard Ballard (plots 100-02), Martha Ballard (plots 96-7), John Ballard (plots 112-3), Bernard and Richard Orpwood (plots 94-5), John Goodwin (plot 114), William Forster (plot 105) were all given land near the village but not contiguous with their homesteads. Five others in Ardington were allocated two parcels; three were in three blocks, three in four, and one in five. William Wiseman Clarke was allocated almost 553 acres in sixteen blocks and John Pollexfen Bastard, 410 acres in seventeen.¹⁷⁶ The land allocated to the larger landowners tended to be more dispersed around the parish and, because it was generally assumed that the larger proprietors would have sufficient capital to improve the downland on enclosure, often included most of the downland. At Ardington, in spite of the clause in the 1801 General Inclosure Act directing the commissioners to allocate to small holders before that of the larger landowners, the awards to Bastard and Clarke appear to have taken precedence. However, even for the large landowners, the inconvenience caused by the lack of consolidation of lands along with the high cost of enclosure could cause serious problems. These factors were at least in part responsible for the sale of the estate of the

Clarke family in Ardington in 1826 after it had been in the family for four centuries.¹⁷⁷

The general perception that enclosure caused the disintegration of the village as farming families moved out of the centre onto the newly created, enclosed farms is, at least in the Wantage area, only justified over the very long term. Many of the isolated farms in the area were the result of earlier enclosures. The house at Ardington Wick, for example, was built in 1687 and area around it was enclosed for paddocks and pasture along with land in the common field.¹⁷⁸ People were used to travelling from the village to their fields and, for the most part, continued to do so for several generations.¹⁷⁹ For a farmer holding land on the downs, daily travel was not practical and certainly not efficient but enclosure was expensive. The relocation in the Wantage area generally took at least one generation and often longer.¹⁸⁰ Neither farmers nor landowners had spare capital to build the dwellings, barns, outhouses and the like needed for a new farm particularly when there was a perfectly good dwelling in the village. In part this was due to the lack of consolidation of land into a single working unit.

The commissioners could also help to maintain the integrity of the village by locating land as close to the homestead as possible. However, over several generations there was a gradual relocation of the farms. As a general

Table 5.1 Farms identified in the 1841 Census of Population

Village	Farms in 1841	
	In the village	Outside the village
Ardington	8	Lockhouse, Hill, <i>Betterton</i> , <i>Wick</i> Farms
West Lockinge	1	0
Grove	6	<i>Barwell</i> , <i>Grove Wick</i> , <i>Grove</i> Farms
Wantage	Manor Farm plus 9 others	<i>Lattin Down</i> , <i>White House</i> , <i>Furzwick</i> , <i>Red House</i> , <i>Mead</i> Farms
East Challow	4	<i>South Woodhill</i> , <i>North Woodhill</i> , <i>Marsh</i> , <i>Hill</i> Farms
Letcombe Regis	<i>Moat House</i> Farm plus 9 others	Bowers Farm
West Challow	<i>Coppice Lease</i> Farm plus 6 others	Milsum, <i>Petwick</i> , Farms
East Lockinge	2	<i>Pinmarsh</i> , <i>West Ginge</i> Farm
Charlton	5	<i>Windsor</i> , <i>Tullwick</i> Farms

- Notes: 1. Italicised farms were established before the parliamentary enclosure award
 2. East Locking and Charlton were not fully enclosed at the time of the census
 3. It has not been possible to find an exact location for Milsum Farm

Source: Census of Population, 1841

¹⁷⁶BRO, Q/RDC 89A

¹⁷⁷ Havinden, 1999, 45; 48

¹⁷⁸ BRO D/ECw T4

¹⁷⁹ Hoskins, 1957a, 99-100; Turner, 1984, 159

rule in England in the early nineteenth century, farmers were tenants rather than owners of the land they farmed. Enclosure dealt with ownership. For this reason the enclosure award offers limited insight into the formation and location of farms. From 1841 the census of population provides sufficient detail to identify farmers and the approximate location of their farms (see Table 5.1)¹⁸⁰. This census taken between twenty and thirty years after the awards in West Challow, Letcombe Regis and East Challow, Wantage and Grove, and Ardington, shows little progress in the creation on the idealised compact farm with the farmhouse, barns, stables, and other buildings at its centre. Of the seventy-six farms identified in the parishes, 53, including Coppice Lease Farm, Manor Farm, and Moat House Farm, were still in the villages. At least nineteen of those farms located away from the villages were established before parliamentary enclosure, leaving only a possible four of a total of 76 farms noted in the census that may have been built in the decades after enclosure. Ten years later in 1851 another three farms – Sandpit at East Challow, Castle Road Farm at Letcombe Regis, and Angell Down Farm at Wantage were added to the list of farms located away from the village after enclosure while the total number of farms had fallen by six. This trend continued. By 1861, after the enclosure of East Lockinge, there had been considerable consolidation of land into fewer farms. At the time of this census only 60 farms, including Lockhouse Farm that was uninhabited, were included on the enumeration. Two additional farms, Warborough Farm at Wantage and Neville’s Farm, an early enclosure farm in West Lockinge occupied by an agricultural labourer were located outside the village. By 1881 67 farms were identified. The number in Wantage had fallen by a quarter with three new farms, Chainhill, Ham, and Stockham enumerated as farms outside the town. At Ardington seven farms were identified in 1861 and only three in 1881. Ardington Wick was not listed (though it remained a farm), nor was the previously unoccupied Lockhouse Farm. The number in Grove rose from seven to thirteen, at Letcombe Regis from nine to fourteen, and at East Lockinge from three to five. At Grove the farms were more scattered along the roads leading out of the village centre but were still

close to the village. Bithams Farm in East Lockinge was built on the old open-field arable land. Thus, while the majority of farms remained in the villages, several of these were new farms located on the former open fields and downs. The 1881 census demonstrates the very gradual relocation of farms in the areas of the early nineteenth century enclosures. However, as shown on the 1883 Six Inch Ordnance Survey Map in the village of Charlton where enclosure had occurred only fifteen years earlier, there was still a cluster of farms, including one of 1100 acres, in the village (see fig.5.7).

Once land had been divided and enclosed, the farmer had to decide for the first time what he was going to grow on his allocation. Some farmers saw no need to change and continued to farm using the cropping calendar they had always followed. However, the situation had changed. The arable and meadow were no longer thrown open to the village flock and herd - managed in the common fields by a shepherd or herdsman employed by the village - to provide manure for the land. The farmer of enclosed land had to feed sufficient stock to manure his land and their care rested solely in his hands. This need alone may have been enough to encourage farmers to try the ‘new’ rotations involving regular courses of roots and clover/grass leys. Even on a small plot, rotational agriculture was essential to maintain fertility and prevent the build-up of disease, weeds, and pests. The new rotation had the additional benefit of providing a good supply of year round animal feed from the turnips and grasses, while still producing crops of wheat and barley for marketing. The rotation could be adjusted to meet the demands of market, to suit the quality of the land and the needs of the animals. If the land were very fertile, as much was in the Wantage area, a rotation very much like the famous Norfolk Four Course On poorer land the years in grass and clover could easily be extended to help the land maintain fertility. The new rotation was ideal for much of the enclosed arable. It was flexible. It maintained the fertility of the soil. It provided feed for livestock. At Ardington for example, by 1841 when the tithe report was written, the land of five qualities had been identified – the downs, the partly chalky and gravelly loams, good open clay loam, strong tenacious clay, and rich clay loam and put to different uses. The downs were mostly pastured by sheep but where arable it was suited to being cropped in a five course of wheat, turnips, barley, then two years of ley. The chalky loam was best managed in a six course with four years of wheat, barley, or oats and one year each of turnips and clover ley. The

¹⁸⁰ Censuses of Population 1841- 1881

¹⁸¹ Using the census for the location of farms is not an exact method. Some farms were occupied by agricultural labourers and farm bailiffs. Where these were noted as farms on the census they were included in the list as were farmers living in the villages.

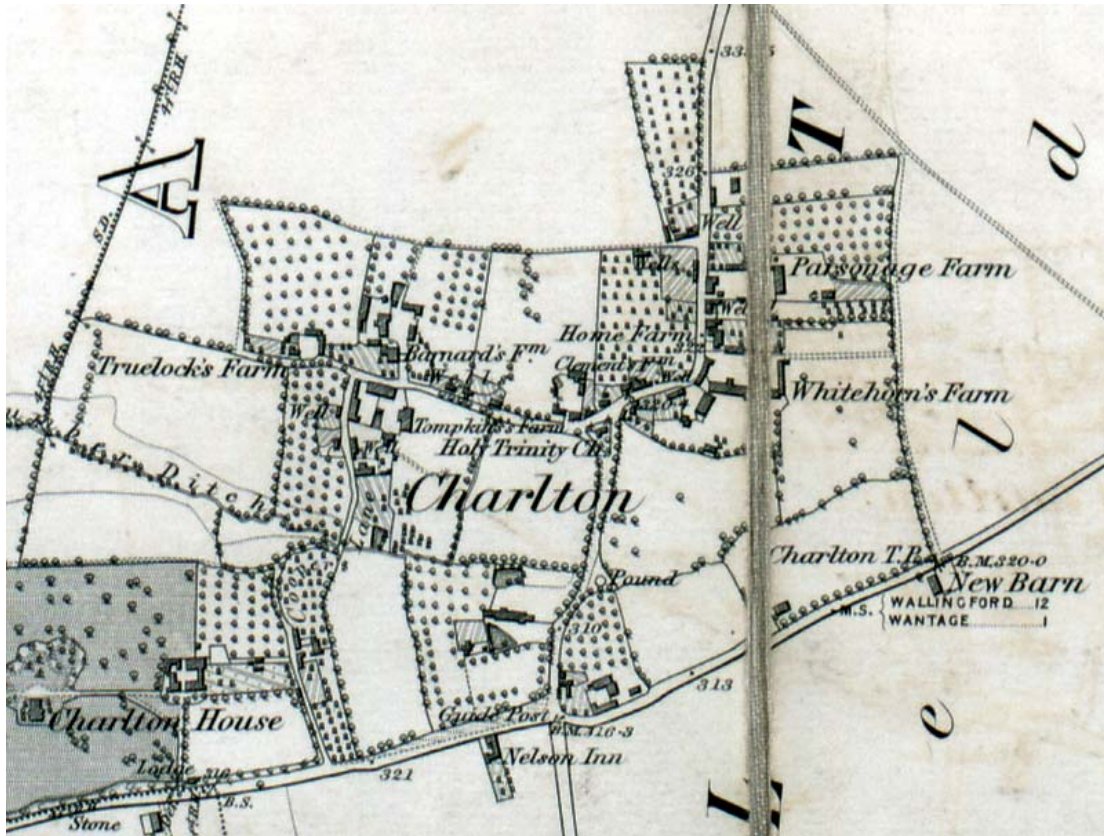


Fig. 5.7 While the relocation of farms associated with enclosure did occur, it often took several generations. This map of Charlton made fifteen years after enclosure shows a continuing concentration of the farms in the village.

Source: Six Inch Ordnance Survey Map, 1883

good clay loam was farmed in an eight course of wheat, turnips or vetches, barley or oats, clover ley, wheat, fallow, barley or oats, and finally another clover ley. The tenacious clay arable was too heavy – i.e. too hard to work into a good consistency, for roots like turnips, so was fallowed when necessary and the rest of the time mostly sown to corn. The rich clay loam was almost entirely in grass.¹⁸² The impact on the landscape of these changes was immense. The greater variation in cropping routines after the entire parish was enclosed created a patchwork pattern of colours and textures in the landscape that was very different from the more uniform cropping of the open field system.

Like much of the clay soils throughout northwest Berkshire, much of the northern area of the four parishes was unsuited to arable husbandry. The heavy clay, and anyone who has tried to work this soil in their garden will understand the concept of a heavy soil, could only be worked during dry weather so was best suited to planting down to permanent pasture. Some was even unsuited to be used as pasture.

In a report assessing the parish of Ardington for tithe commutation, the inspector commented:

meadow land in Ardington is exceedingly wet and low and totally unfit for stock in the winter – some of these meadows are very productive – the larger portion of them are mown every year and the Hay sold. They are scarcely accessible in the winter¹⁸³

Because it was difficult to manage as arable, much of the very heavy clay land had already been converted to grassland after earlier enclosure. Of the remaining was much converted at the time of the award and has remained in grass ever since. There is physical evidence of this long-standing conversion to grassland in some of the fields in the northern part of the area. Because heavy clay land was difficult to drain, ploughing was done in such a manner so to create a corrugated pattern of raised ridges on which the crops were planted and depressions, or furrows, that would help the water drain off the field. When land was converted from tillage to grass, the ridge and

¹⁸² National Archives, Kew IR 18/13096

¹⁸³ National Archives, Kew IR 18/13096



Fig 5.8 Enclosure field pattern showing both the rectangular straight-edged fields and fields with the gentle backwards S-shaped boundaries determined by the shape of the open field strips in the Ardington/Lockinge area.

Source: MERL, University of Reading

furrow pattern remained. On those lands that are particularly well adapted to permanent grass and have never been subsequently ploughed, the ridge and furrow markings remain visible in the landscape.

The enclosure award only laid down the ring fence boundaries of a holding; it was up to the owner or his tenant to decide where to place the internal boundaries. Because parliamentary enclosure involved very different land qualities and uses, there was considerable variation in field patterns. On the arable, the length of the rotation, whether it was four, five, six, or even eight or more years long, would determine the division of the fields. This, in turn, was largely governed by the type of soil available. Fields for pasturing livestock were often quite small. The large fields associated with Tudor and Stuart enclosures were found to be too large and were often divided. Livestock management, particularly disease control, along with good grassland husbandry were simpler in smaller fields. The hedges also provided shelter for the animals. Robert Bakewell from the county of Leicestershire and best known for establishing the Leicester breed of sheep, believed 'that fifty

acres of pasture ground divided into five enclosures will go as far in grazing cattle as sixty acres in one piece.'¹⁸⁴ For these reasons, fields devoted to pasture and meadows were generally smaller than the arable fields.

Although parliamentary enclosure tended to complete the process by which all the land, apart from occasional areas of common, in a parish was held in severalty, the parish was rarely enclosure by a single means. The post-enclosure landscape contained areas newly enclosed by award along side much older 'ancient enclosures'. While some of the small haphazard areas of piecemeal enclosure taken out of the arable or commons disappeared at the time of the parliamentary enclosure, larger areas of non-parliamentary enclosure remained untouched. For this reason a map of a parish after parliamentary enclosure often showed fields with variety of shapes and sizes. However, the shape of many fields enclosed by act of Parliament quickly identifies them. Rectangular fields with incredibly straight boundaries are quintessentially parliamentary enclosure fields. The working map for the enclosure at Ardington demonstrates the complete disregard often paid to the older field system (see fig 5.2). Many of

¹⁸⁴ Monk, 1794, 46

the allotments have been laid out perpendicular to the new enclosure road in fields with slightly less than right-angled corners and straight edges. This was not always the case. In some situations, possibly determined by the road system or by geography, or even just because it was the simplest decision to take, field boundaries could follow the boundary patterns in the old fields. Most often there would be a combination of both. Aerial photographs demonstrate this well. Figure 5.8 taken in the 1960s over Lockinge and Ardington shows a combination of straight-edged and gentle reversed S-shaped boundaries in the fields created by parliamentary enclosure.

Hedges and Woodlands

Hedges are probably the most widely recognised feature of an enclosure landscape (see fig 5.9). Within six to twelve months of an award being made, the hedges and ditches along the roads had to be planted. The hedge typically was a double row of hawthorn – also called quick or whitethorn. Instructions for planting the hedges were sometimes very specific. At Great Shefford the hedges were to be made with 100 quicks of 3 yrs growth, per lug, pole, or perch of 16.5 feet.¹⁸⁵ The function of the hedge was solely to delineate the property, to provide a degree of shelter, and to provide a stock-proof barrier. Ideally it was as narrow and compact as possible. It was calculated that on a farm of five hundred acres, forty acres could be taken up by hedges.¹⁸⁶ Between 1750 and 1850 200,000 miles of hedge was planted in England as a result of enclosure.¹⁸⁷ It was also one of the most expensive elements of enclosure. The plants were purchased from

nurseries, by this time located around most market towns.¹⁸⁸ In 1766, for example, William Pendar of Woolhampton in Berkshire included an estimate for 4000 quicksets at five

shillings in an estimate for Lord Bruce of Tottenham at Savernake in Wiltshire.¹⁸⁹ In addition, many enclosure commissioners, such as those at West Challow, insisted that the hedges be protected from livestock by building a post and rail fence on either side that was to stay in place long enough for the hedge to become established. John Davis was a known advocate of allowing controlled grazing of a field for seven years rather than installing fence. He saw this as a means of making a significant reduction in the cost of enclosure.¹⁹⁰ Other measures were also taken to reduce costs. When possible, straight field boundaries combined with the straight roads, could make a real difference to the cost of hedging over the area of a parish. The straight, single species hedge is a typical sign of a landscape created by an act of Parliament.



Fig. 5.9 The enclosure hedge and ditch along Ardington Lane in Ardington is typical of the boundaries created by parliamentary enclosure. They were straight to reduce the cost of materials, generally two plants thick and of single specie. They were planted to form a stock-proof barrier. The ditch four feet deep and two wide was required for drainage on the heavy clays.

¹⁸⁵ BRO D/ED E13A

¹⁸⁶ Dean, 50

¹⁸⁷ Rackman, 190

¹⁸⁸ Williamson, 72-3; Muir, 45

¹⁸⁹ Muir, 45

¹⁹⁰ Young, 1800, 93 & 95



Fig 5.10 The field pattern in the Ardington area showing the largely unhedged fields that in the Wantage area are often the result enclosure rather than grubbing up of enclosure hedges in recent times. The 1801 Act allowed arable and down land to be made several but remain unfenced.
Source: MERL University of Reading

Another method was frequently used in the Wantage area to help reduce or spread the cost of hedging. The acts for Ardington and Wantage and Grove specified that the arable did not need to be with hedging. In the hamlet of West Challow, the act specified that no fencing was mandatory for the land on the south side of the closes called The Laines. At Letcombe Regis and East Challow the downs were included with the arable in requiring no fencing.¹⁹¹ In other words, the arable, and sometimes the downs, were divided and allotted in individual ownership, but were not necessarily separated from other holdings by a hedge, fence, mound, or ditch. Under a provision of the 1801 General Inclosure Act it was possible to continue working the arable as an open, and even common field system. The biggest difference would be that the land was in larger, consolidated units. While there is no evidence of common husbandry continuing in the Wantage area after enclosure, much of the arable was left unhedged. Looking at the area today, it is often assumed that the large fields have resulted from the modern tendency to grub

up hedges. However, the tithe commissioner commented in the 1841 tithe report for Ardington, ‘The whole of the arable land though enclosed (or rather allotted) by an act of Parliament is *open* – not a vestige of a fence or even a boundary marker is to be seen.’¹⁹² On his tour of England in 1851, the agriculturalist, James Caird, noted that in the countryside eastward from Wantage even public roads were unfenced and there were often no hedges dividing different kinds of crops in the fields.¹⁹³ The large fields in the parishes on the 1883 Six-Inch Ordnance Survey Map confirm that little had changed. Even today the unhedged fields continue to give the landscape an open characteristic that few associate with enclosure. The impact of this on the landscape is particularly noticeable in much of northern Berkshire including Letcombe Regis and Wantage. In the four parishes, much of the area in the old open fields was probably never divided by hedges (see Fig. 5.10).

Today there is a great deal of interest in the preservation and replanting of hedgerows to ensure greater environmental bio-diversity.

¹⁹¹ 41 Geo. III c.118 (1801); 42 Geo. III c.99 (1802); 43 Geo. III c. 106 (1803); 48 Geo. III c.74 (1808)

¹⁹² PRO IR 18/ 13096

¹⁹³ Caird, 114

Woodlands attract similar interest. However, while enclosure promoted hedge planting, it had a more mixed impact on woodlands. On many of the larger estates owners planted trees as to enhance the appearance of their land, to create windbreaks and to provide cover for game and coverts for foxes. Scattered areas of woodland were planted in the years after enclosure on the Lockinge Estate making the area more densely wooded after enclosure than before. However, a provision in many enclosure acts gave the original owners of trees and bushes on land to be exchanged at enclosure the right to have trees on their land valued and demand payment from the new owner. If this were not paid, the original owner could cut the trees and remove them within a year of the award. Documentation of this is unusual but does exist for the Lambourn Almshouses Estate. Land that was to be exchanged, particularly that originally owned by the charity, was quite heavily wooded. Both William Wiseman Clarke and John Pollexfen Bastard agreed to take some of the standing trees. In spite of this, over £150 of timber was cut and sold off the estate. Many oaks scattered around the meadowland were also cut.¹⁹⁴ The right to cut any trees that the new owner of exchanged land almost certainly led to the destruction of many acres of woodland at and just after enclosure.

Provision for the Poor

Many lost out at enclosure. The common and waste along with the right of shack on the arable disappeared and the village poor lost whatever use they had made of this land. The precise nature of the rights held by those in the village over the common land is unclear. In some parts of England an ‘ancient homestead’, also known as a common cottage, is generally thought to have had the right to graze two cows on the common.¹⁹⁵ At the end of the eighteenth century this was calculated to have been worth between £14 and £20 per year, or 56 to 80 per cent of the average agricultural labourer’s annual income. The right to use the common to fatten a pig was valued at £3 to £4 10s, or 12 to 18 per cent of their annual income.¹⁹⁶ However, since by no means all cottages were ‘ancient homesteads’, it is difficult to determine whom had rights to the common associated with a cottage. Sarah Cook claimed for common of pasture for two cows and the Hayward's Gore one year in every

twenty as owner of a house in East Challow. She was awarded 0.10 of an acre of meadow in White Mead.¹⁹⁷ Richard Castle a copyhold tenant of Corpus Christi College claimed common for three cows in Fox Mead, Ardington where he was awarded 0.02 of an acre.¹⁹⁸ William Heading of Grove claimed commons for three cows and 60 sheep in Kingsgrove but does not appear to have been awarded any land.¹⁹⁹ In a study of ten settlements in the south and east Midlands, it was found that only two to three per cent of agricultural labourers owned common cottages and another 13 to 18 per cent rented them.²⁰⁰ Arthur Young, a proponent of enclosure, believed that, in general, agricultural labourers and poor husbandmen did not have cottages that gave them rights to graze a cow, but often were able to graze cows without any legal rights.²⁰¹ At Letcombe at least it would seem that many did graze cattle on the common. Young noted that in Letcombe, ‘The poor seem the greatest sufferers; they can no longer keep a cow, which before many of them did, and they are therefore now maintained by the parish.’²⁰² The abstract of claims for Letcombe Regis does not list any such claims. However, while only a limited number of the poor in a village had the legal right to graze animals on the common, in an area where there was no excessive pressure on the waste it is probable that many fed their livestock not by right but by indulgence or through the neglect the village officers.

The poor also often had common shackle or the right on the open fields to feed pigs and geese. Many more had other rights of common. The right to gather fuel on common land has been calculated at £2 to £5 or 8 to 20 per cent of the agricultural labourer’s annual income.²⁰³ Even if the poor did not have access to common land for grazing and fattening livestock, its use was an important element in the well being of the agricultural labourer’s family. Gleaning on the common land also supplemented the family income of the poor. Once the major landowners had decided to enclose there was little the poor of the parish could do either to stop the process or to protect their own interests. Mavor, writing in the early nineteenth century noted, ‘On enclosure it is frequently found that too little regard had been paid to the real or customary

¹⁹⁴ BRO D/QI C14

¹⁹⁵ Shaw-Taylor, 2001a, 98

¹⁹⁶ Shaw-Taylor, 2001b, 61, 2001, 645

¹⁹⁷ BRO D/EEL E9

¹⁹⁸ BRO D/QI E10

¹⁹⁹ BRO Q/W 33

²⁰⁰ Shaw-Taylor, 2001a, 96

²⁰¹ Young 1808, 12; 167-8

²⁰² Young 1808, 150

²⁰³ Shaw-Taylor, 2001b, 61, 2001, 645; Neeson (1993), 165, Humphries (1990), 53



Fig. 5.11 Setting land aside to create allotments for the poor was one solution adopted by some parishes at enclosure as compensation for the loss of the common and waste. The enclosure allotments at East Lockinge, required under the conditions of the 1845 General Inclosure Act, were established in lieu of right to cut furze and bushes on the waste and common.

rights of the poor.²⁰⁴ While the 1801 General Act for Inclosure did make some attempt to protect the small holder from the worst affects, little was done for the poor until the General Inclosure Act of 1845. This required that if there were waste of the manor with tenants having right of common, if the waste were unstinted, or if it were open all year for cattle levant and couchant, the parish could be required to set aside land to be used for allotments for the labouring poor. If the manor had a population of over 2000, it was also required to provide land for exercise and recreation.²⁰⁵ While the population of East Lockinge fell below the minimum figure for a recreation ground, the parish was required to establish allotments for the poor (see fig. 5.11) This allotment provided in lieu of the right to cut furze and bushes was let out to labourers of the parish. It was 3 acre 1 rood 24perches and was divided into 43 equal plots.²⁰⁶ Although the size and the division of the allotment appears to have altered, this landscape feature remains today as a symbol of a more humanitarian attitude to the poor at the time of enclosure than had been taken at the time of other enclosures in the four parishes.

The polarisation of wealth encouraged by the need for efficiency and success that sprang out of enclosure had other visible manifestations in the landscape. The landscape reflected a change

in attitude towards the poor. In the pre-enclosure community the needs of all were more easily met from the hedges and the commons and wastes. At enclosure the use of the common, whether by right or through indulgence and neglect, was lost to the poor.²⁰⁷ However, had the

traditional practice of hedge making persisted, some of the needs of the poor could have been

provided from the hedgerow. The hedges around old enclosures were between six and ten feet wide and provided a variety of wood, berries, and nuts. The variety of plants found in the old hedges was not, as is suggested by the technique of dating hedges by the number of species, simply because of years of haphazard volunteer growth of new plants. Often hedges were planted to provide for the needs of the community, including the poor.²⁰⁸ In the sixteenth century Thomas Tusser wrote that the abundance of fruit and fuel found in the hedges was one of the advantages of enclosures.²⁰⁹ By the time of the parliamentary enclosures in the early years of the nineteenth century attitudes had changed sufficiently that no such provision was made (see figs 5.12 and 5.13). The hedge was no longer seen as a means to augment the dietary and fuel - hawthorn was a poorly burning wood - needs of the poor.²¹⁰ The hedge had become little more than a livestock barrier. The thinner it could be built, the less land it wasted. William Bushnell of Aston Tirrold, one of the enclosure commissioners for Wantage and Grove, believed that hedges took up space, harboured birds and insects, and shaded the corn.²¹¹ The verges again reflected the diminishing tolerance shown towards the poor, destitute, and itinerant. In the enclosures up

²⁰⁴ Mavor, 1809, 151

²⁰⁵ 8&9 Vic, c.118 (1845)

²⁰⁶ BRO Q/RDc 87A

²⁰⁷ Turner, (1988), 115-16

²⁰⁸ Williamson, 12; Johnson, 1978, 195-204; Tusser, 102

²⁰⁹ Tusser, 102; Williamson, 12

²¹⁰ Williamson 73-4; Young, 1813, 49

²¹¹ Mavor, 144



Figs. 5.12 and 5.13 demonstrate the different nature of an old enclosure hedge and one from the nineteenth century. The ancient hedge (left) from north of Grove is about ten feet wide and contains edible plants and a good supply of fuel. The later hedge (right) in Letcombe Regis is species poor and provides little apart from shelter and a stock-proof barrier. The two hedges illustrate the changing attitude of landowners towards the poor and the impact of this on the landscape.

until the fourth quarter of the eighteenth century roads and their verges were often sixty feet wide. This was reduced quite dramatically in the years that followed. While improved road making techniques were being introduced, this was initially applied to turnpikes.²¹² The reduction in width was at least in part to prevent the 'illegitimate' use of the verge for grazing livestock and for squatting by gypsies, vagabonds, and the poor of the parish.²¹³

The ethos of the enclosure movement had been firmly stamped onto the surface of the English countryside. The movement began slowly and with much opposition. However, by the mid eighteenth century the momentum was sufficient that it could not be halted. In a century and a half, the enclosure commissioners appointed by act of parliament transformed the landscape of a fifth of the English countryside. They created an easily discernable, quintessentially English landscape. Each region responded to the opportunities presented by

enclosure in a way that reflected the type and timing of the enclosure along with the needs and aspirations of that community. In the Wantage area of Berkshire where over half the surface remained to be moulded by the commissioners, the impact was more muted than in some other enclosed areas. Because several of the enclosure acts made the fencing of the allotments optional on the arable and the downs, there are and have always been fewer miles of hedging than are found in most other area enclosed largely through act of Parliament. However, although the fields are unhedged they are still very much enclosed. Even without the hedges, the landscape was divided and allotted to create a rational and efficient network of farms. The successful were able to display their achievement in their isolated farmhouses surrounded by acres of neatly hedged, regularly shaped fields intersected by functional, straight roads. The landscape of parliamentary enclosure remains visible to any who cares to look at the evidence.

²¹² Taylor, 1979, 160

²¹³ Turner, 1984, 147