

CHAPTER 7

GETTING A LIVING FROM THE LAND

For much of the time that Hagley has existed as a named place in the last thousand years, agriculture was the main activity that provided the basic everyday needs of its inhabitants and it is only in the second half of the twentieth century that farming as an occupation has been reduced to its present state where two or three individuals are managing huge mechanical resources to grow and process a minimal range of crops plus tree planting and other set aside schemes.

POPULATION CHANGES

To understand the changes in agricultural practice, some idea of the population changes is necessary.

The Domesday survey of 1086 is the first numerical source to be considered. Hagley is credited with one priest, five villagers, eleven smallholders and two slaves. A total of nineteen. Five is the accepted multiplier when estimating wives and children so we can say that the total population was near to one hundred.

The population is assumed to have expanded by about three times in the early 14th century. However a series of poor harvests and the Black Death of 1349 probably reduced the numbers to around the 1086 figure.

The first parish register⁵⁵ for Hagley indicates 14 families in 1540 and double that in 1590. Bishop Sandys⁵⁶ census of 1563 shows 19 families. The 1540 figure is below the 1086 figure but by the end of the century there is evidence of growth.

The next set of figures available is the census returns⁵⁷ 1801 to 1851 which shows an expansion from 621 people to 935.

Finally, the figure for 1931 was 1937 persons. Later census figures are not considered as the size of Hagley parish was reduced in 1933 when Blakedown was taken into Churchill parish and after 1933 it would no longer be a fair comparison.

The graph (fig 2) shows a pattern that relates to national figures for the same period, but it should be remembered that all statistics prior to 1801 should be treated with care. Estimates based on guesswork, however inspired are only approximations.

⁵⁵ Hagley parish register 1538-1631

⁵⁶ Nash History of Worcestershire vol I p.491

⁵⁷ Census returns. County record office

LAND USAGE

The manor and parish of Hagley until 1933 has had an area of some 970 ha (2400 acres) and it is proposed to examine how this was used. Accurate figures are not easy to obtain but, by linking those that are available with historical facts and observation made in the field, it is hoped that a picture will develop for a changing landscape.

The entry in Domesday tells us that there was one plough for the lord's land and five ploughs shared between the priest, villagers etc. It was estimated that there was land which could utilize another eight ploughs. It is generally accepted that 50 ha (120 acres) is a fair annual work load for one plough team. Therefore, with a possible total of 14 ploughs, the arable potential would be 700 ha (1730 acres). We are also told of woodland $\frac{1}{2}$ league x 3 furlongs, which approximates to 1205m (1320 yds) x 600m (660 yds), giving an area of 70ha (180 acres). The present day Hagley wood is 40ha (100 acres) and the medieval bank and ditch is visible on its eastern and southern boundaries. The northern side has a ditch but this is fairly modern as it is adjacent to the trunk road developed in width from a much older highway. Most of the missing area can be accounted for on the west side and the south west corner. The original boundary is clearly defined on the ground and assuming no doubt accounts for 20ha (50 acres). The small deficit is possibly due to dubious surveying practices, or some shrinkage, before the boundary bank and ditch defined the area permanently.

The difference between the total and the arable, plus the woodland, is 200 ha (490 acres) i.e. 20% for meadowland, rough grazing, roads and housing or, in practical terms, some 4 ha (10 acres) for each of the projected households. Removing the eight ploughs that were deemed possible, there was obviously more than adequate meadowland etc.

The heavier wetter lands in the manor are the uplands and the light soils lie mainly on the lower levels. As a rough guide, this division is around 200m (600 ft) and the early cultivation probably took place above 130m (425 ft) but below 200m. Water for cooking and for the animals was readily available and a medium size team of oxen could be used. Later heavier soils were cultivated and, in post medieval times, the light lowland areas came under the plough.

The method of ploughing using a team of oxen, which varied in size according to the type of soil, would produce a corrugated effect on the land recognized as ridge and furrow. The larger the team the greater the sweep would be as they turned at the end of a row and this would show as a large inverted "S".

Conversely light soils, with small teams, would only have a very modest bend indeed, almost straight furrows would result.

Ridge and furrow has been observed in several parts of the parish about 130m (425 ft) and up to 265m (870 ft).

In 1349 Robert de Hagley⁵⁸, a son of Edmund de Hagley (the lord of the manor) held an area of land totalling 27ha (68 acres) to the east of Hagley Wood, described as Le Vallyng. It is suggested that it should be Le Fælging i.e. fallow grassland.

On the 10th August 1349 Robert leased this land to five men named William de Thomenton; John le Porter; Walter le Mason; Adam atte Yate (Gate) and John le Breustere (Brewer). It is known that two priests had already died and presumably many others by mid-August. Therefore Robert was cutting his losses and reallocating the leases to a group of craftsmen and tradesmen with an element of panic, otherwise one would expect transfers of land to take place in October, ready for the autumn ploughing.

Examination of field patterns on maps suggests a rather haphazard development, with a high level of assarting, not only on the edge of the official woodland but also in other upland areas.

The middle ground has a number of furlongs. Furlongs are blocks of strips which, in turn, are the areas of land allocated on a periodic basis to individual householders.

As we have seen the population was static until the late 16th century. The Lytteltons had acquired Hagley in 1564 and, in common with most of the owners from about 1400, they were absentee landlords. John Lyttelton moved to the old Hagley Hall when he married Meriel and started the recovery of the manor's fortunes. John got involved with the Essex plot and died in the tower in 1601⁵⁹. His widow, Meriel⁶⁰ recovered the estates in 1603 and proceeded to wipe out the large debts of the estate.

Following John's death a description⁶¹ of the estate included "the Brak" and the right of warren. The Brake still exists as an area and as a road name and comes from the old English Bræc meaning wasteland covered with brushwood.

In October 1588⁶² John Gray of Envillè and Christopher Sparry of Clent were presented at Hagley Court for entering the lord's free warren and hunting with hawks. The sentence is unknown but it confirms the right of free warren for the lord for his own use in hunting small game. The popular misconception that warrens were physical structures for the keeping of rabbits is not always true.

⁵⁸ The Lyttelton charters No.142

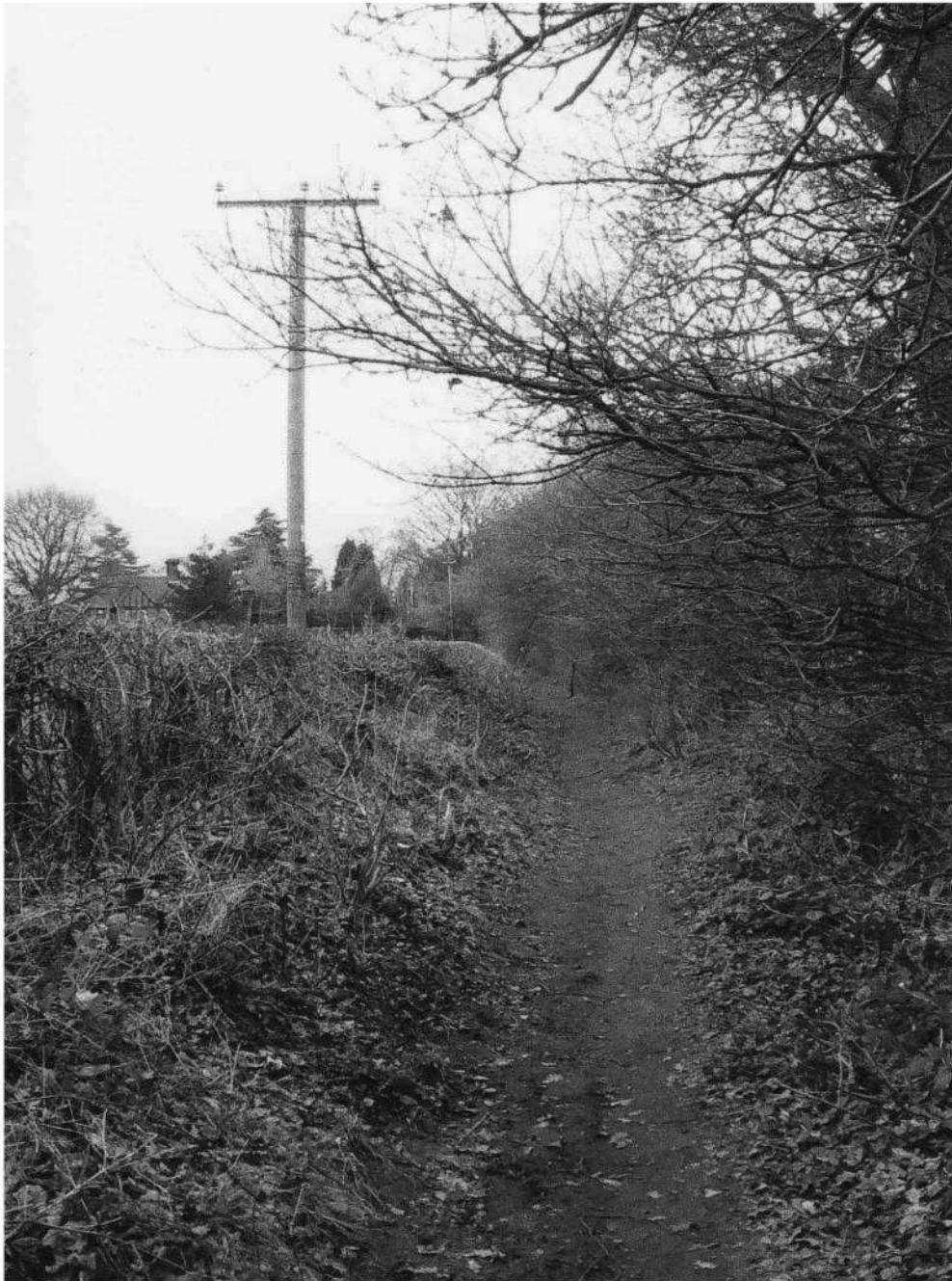
⁵⁹ Nash p.490

⁶⁰ Nash p.492

⁶¹ V.C.H Vol 1 p.134

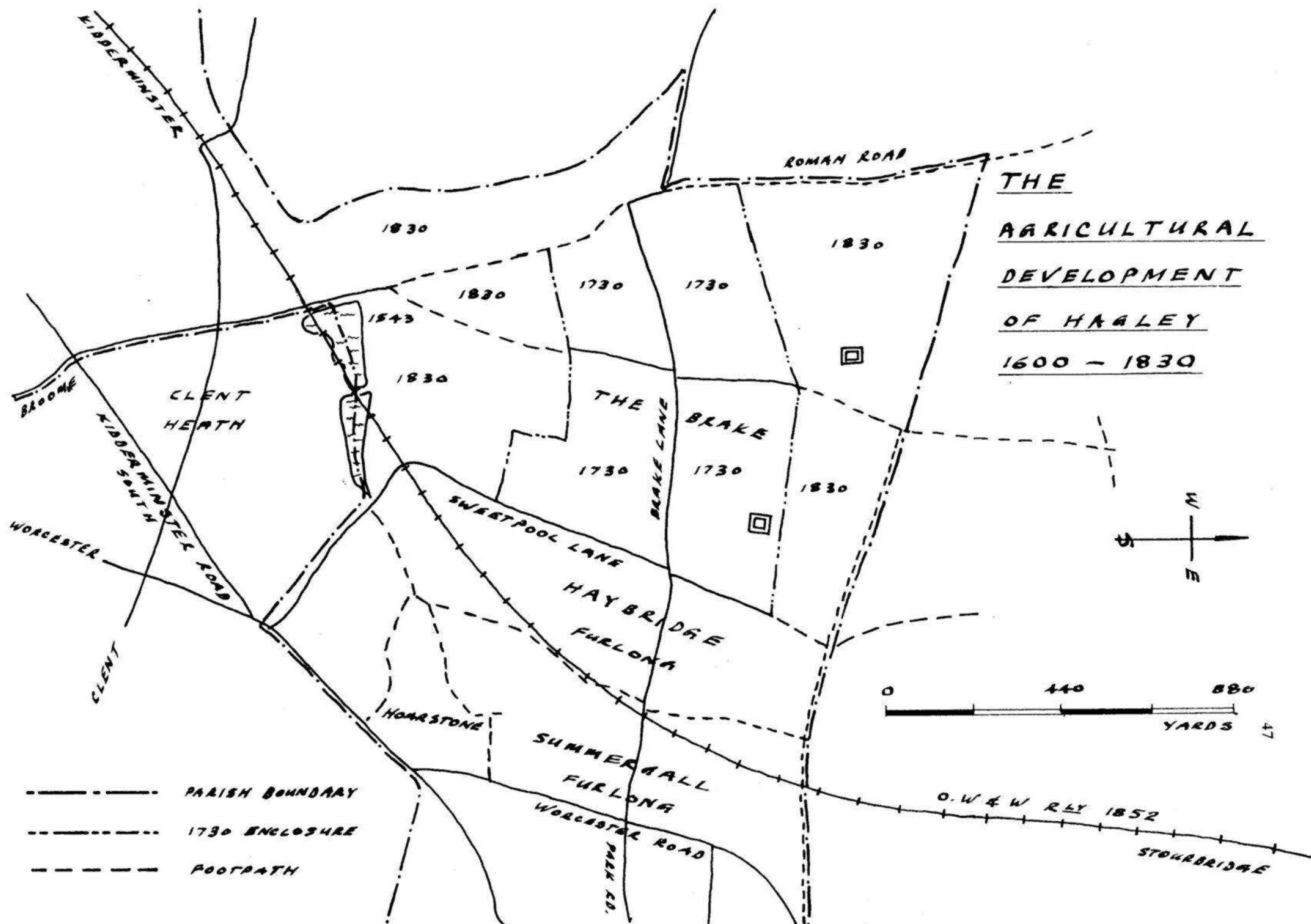
⁶² J.Amphlett. A short history of Clent p.103

As the population grew in the 17th century more land was brought into cultivation and, as part of a move westward, two furlongs each of some 20 ha (50 acres) were developed. They lie east and west of the stream which, in turn, became the route of the railway line. The former has Summer Gall as a part of many of the field names found on the tithe map. Gall from galla indicates barren or wet land, perhaps only worked in the summer. On the west side of the stream is Haybridge. Hay comes from hæg, an enclosure. The bridge over the railway (1852) is nothing to do with the name, which is probably derived from breech, meaning land broken up for cultivation.

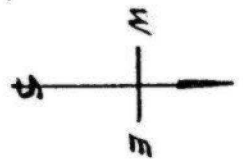
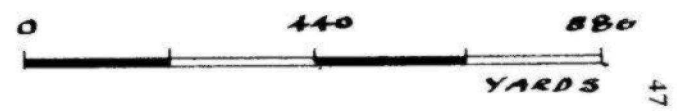


The track leading from Brake Lane and giving access to what was common grazing land between 1730 and 1830

THE
AGRICULTURAL
DEVELOPMENT
OF HAILEY
1600 - 1830



- PARISH BOUNDARY
- · - · - 1730 ENCLOSURE
- FOOTPATH



In 1730 further enclosures took place on the Brake, which was common grazing land by then and the new fields appear to have been accessed from existing lanes and tracks, leaving the back land for common grazing.

Support for this idea is found in two small enclosures⁶³, both of about 0.3 ha (0.7 acres) identified from an aerial photograph and subsequently confirmed by excavation on site. One was on a field close to Brake Lane which had been enclosed, it is thought, in 1730. The other is on the field at the back of those enclosed at this time. The suggested use for these two enclosures is for herding sheep or other livestock at night time. The second one, on the back land, would have replaced the first when the 1730 enclosure took place. Two other similar enclosures have been identified on Blakedown and Harborough commons.

When the leases for the fields on the Brake expired in 1830, after 99 years, the first of two Parliamentary Enclosure Acts were used to enclose the rest of the land on the Brake. In total some 110 ha (280 acres) were enclosed. At the same time, the opportunity was taken to extinguish common rights in Hagley Wood, Roundhill Wood and Henmarsh Wood. Two years later Blakedown and Harborough Commons, with an area of about 93 ha (230 acres), were enclosed.

The allocation of land is difficult to assess in terms of fairness but the requirement that the new occupiers were, within six months, to provide wagon and bridle gates and stiles in the boundary and other fences across the roads and, where necessary, make ditches, drains and watercourses, plus bridges and culverts, must have been an impossible task in terms of both time, labour and materials.

In 1838 the tithe map and schedules set out the size and use of all the land in the parish, giving the first complete picture of the mix of woodland, grass, arable and water. The newly enclosed lands were very largely arable. The older cultivated areas continued with mixed farming.

The pattern for all farmland in the second half of the 19th century, and up to 1950, was one of mixed farming. Since 1950 a swing to arable farming took place and, more recently, the set aside policies of the Government has led to plantations and grassland.

Hagley Park fades in and out of the historical records. The earliest date is in 1363 at the time when John Botetort of Weoley Castle was, temporarily, lord of the manor. A document quoted by Nash⁶⁴ as a footnote mentions the park and a Willelmo Parcario (does his name go with his job?) and also 29 gallons of ale for those who attended the lord's great hunting.

⁶³ Pagett, Enclosures on Hagley Brake 1992 with H. & W S.M.R.

⁶⁴ Nash p.488 note t

When the estate changed hands in 1564 the then Hagley Hall, located on the site of the present day cricket pitch, is described as a hunting lodge and it is reasonable to assume there was an area in which to hunt.

In 1694 Sir Charles Lyttelton⁶⁵ is credited with re-imparking the park. Before the present hall was built Sir Thomas Lyttelton had started the building of the Temple of Theseus and the Gothic Castle. His son, Lord George, in addition to building the Palladian style hall, developed the park including monuments to Frederick, Prince of Wales and the poets Pope, Thompson, Milton and Shenstone. The water features and the grotto are now difficult to identify as features in any grand scheme but the range of specimen trees, many of which were part of the original planting, are surviving much better than some of the man-made structures.

An electrified chain link fence, designed to protect the herd of deer, surrounds the present-day park. Banks and ditches, assumed to be parts of earlier uncompleted boundaries, do not match the modern perimeter, and the fact that they are incomplete makes any estimate of the area of a medieval park impossible.

CROPS AND LIVESTOCK

Scanning early documents for any hints of crops and livestock gives a very hazy picture. Fines were levied in terms of sheep, capons and hens. Ale was consumed in large quantities. The right to graze animals was granted but what animals and how many?

In Hagley the earliest useful documents⁶⁶ are a number of wills and inventories from 1576 to 1644. These show that corn; barley; rye; oats; hay and peas were grown and stored. In three cases barns are mentioned. Livestock included horses; cattle; sheep; pigs; poultry and bees. These items are the total and most of the inventories list only two or three. It is interesting to note that only three of the nine record horses and these are described as a horse with furniture (harness), a little mare and one old nag. In two cases it is stated that there was grain in fields totalling 8ha (20 acres) and 12ha (30 acres). One horse could have been capable of ploughing but the little mare and the old nag are very doubtful as workhorses. Of the other six wills, three mention growing grain but had no horses and, in only one case, are any of the cattle called oxen. Was cultivation a contract business?

Most of the inventories suggest animals were kept for home consumption. However, three of them list numbers of sheep as 39, 100 and 109, but no clue as to their use for wool or meat.

R.C.Gaunt, in his book on agriculture in Worcestershire, quotes Young's work written in the 18th century, based on a six-month tour of

⁶⁵ Nash p.490

⁶⁶ C.R.O. Worcester

northern England. In 1768⁶⁷ Young said that there were 13 farms in Hagley with 560 ha (1383 acres), an average of 40 ha (100 acres) and in total, they had 74 horses, 83 cows and 1,100 sheep. Looking at two unidentified farms, one of 60ha(150 acres) with 12ha (30 acres) of grass and 48ha (120 acres) of arable and the other of 40ha (100 acres) had 4ha (10 acres) of grass and 36ha(90 acres) of arable.

From the same source, crops included corn, grass, wheat, barley, oats and peas. The existence of a dairymaid suggests milk, butter and cheese.

Sheep still appear to be important. Already noted is the total of 1,100 but the two farms mentioned above had 200 and 150 respectively. Bearing in mind that common land exceeding 200ha (500 acres) still existed, it must have been allocated on the basis of two sheep per acre of grazing and this in turn was geared to the farmer's holding; say 2½:1 of common grazing land.

By the time of the survey for the Tithe Commutation Act 1836, all the common land in Hagley had been enclosed and certainly in mid-nineteenth century "new land" was very largely for arable use. The enclosures were intended to increase productivity and usually they did. However, the Corn Laws, designed to protect farmers from Russian and eastern European grain imports, were repealed in 1846 and caused farmers to turn to beef and dairy production, or at least a mixture of arable and grass.

Brake Mill Farm demonstrates this change. Newly built because the railway ran through the site of its predecessor c1850, it began with the barn. Other buildings were added, differing in the building details and designed for dairy cattle and pigs.

The practice of mixed farming continued until around 1950. Cattle for beef and dairy products, sheep and pigs were kept by many of the farms. Crops varied with the full range of grain i.e. wheat, barley and oats, plus potatoes, carrots, turnips and peas.

In the second half of the twentieth century the majority of the land had become arable and crops reduced to wheat, barley and sugar beet.

The number of farms in 1768 has been given as 13. This had increased, marginally, by 1838 and it is estimated that in the early 20th century the numbers had increased to 18. In 1997 it is down to two operating as more or less self-contained units. The rest of the land is managed from offices using contractors to carry out most of the work.

⁶⁷ R.C.Gaunt. A history of Worcestershire agriculture p.178

WATER

Water in earlier times governed the location of the population. With a spring line around 210m (700 ft), the relatively flat area centred on the parish church was an obvious choice for early settlement, although two outlying settlements at Wassell Grove and Harborough Hall existed in medieval times.

The only water mill⁶⁸ which used to grind corn that existed within the parish was Churchill mill which, for practical and geographical purposes, was of more use to Churchill Manor. However, as lord of the manor of Hagley, Robert de Hagley c.1216, got 20 shillings (100p) per annum when the rent for the Churchill manor was only 6 shillings and eight pence (33p). Right on the boundary it may have been but still worth quite a lot. Other water mills are noted in the industry and transport chapter.

Fishponds are often given that description when there is no hard evidence for it but, in 1367⁶⁹, a charter gave Henry and Elizebeth de Hambury permission to create a fishpond near the road leading from Harborough to Kidderminster and close to the fishpond of Henry de Bradeford. The probability is that both lay in the valley adjacent to Harborough Hall. In 1601⁷⁰ on the death of John Lyttelton there is mention of a fish pool called "Brodeford Pool, lately broken by flood". Other pools in the parish are still used for angling but this is very different from the fish farming carried on in earlier times.

Expansion to the lower lying parts of the parish relied in the main on digging wells and installing hand pumps. The 25" O.S. map shows a pump to every two or three dwellings. Piped water came to the area west of Hagley Hall. A lead pipe brought water from a spring in Hagley park when the hall was built in the mid-18th century and this was distributed to many of the older houses for over 200 years.

Stourbridge Water Board supplied water to parts of Hagley c1909 and about the same time, sewers became almost universal.

SUMMARY

In the last 1000 years many changes have occurred in population; in the area under cultivation; in animal husbandry; in the use of woodland for building materials and fuel, and the use of water.

These changes have, with a few exceptions, not been planned with the landscape in mind and, even with current legislation, little has changed

⁶⁸ The Lyttelton charters No.10

⁶⁹ The Lyttelton charters No.174

⁷⁰ V.C.H. Vol 1 p.134

in that respect. One can only hope that it does before the effects of a millenium are obliterated in a few years time.



Hagley station, originally part of the Oxford, Worcester and Wolverhampton Railway opened in 1852. The footbridge is dated 1884 and it is probable the buildings on the right of the photograph are of the same date.