

The
Lord Hastings
Memorial Lecture

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DELIVERED BY

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Livestock Changes in Norfolk since the Year 1780

First let me say how honoured I feel by being asked to give the first of the Lord Hastings lectures. It is fitting perhaps that I was chosen to do so, for I was born on his Melton Constable Estate, my father being a tenant on one of his farms at Briston. I can appreciate therefore the atmosphere of sound and progressive methods of farming on which the estate as a whole was run while later, visiting his home farm with my uncle who was his veterinary surgeon, I saw the great interest he took in the improvement of livestock. As is well known, however, his interest in agriculture extended far beyond his own estate and he played a large part in the application of science to agriculture not only through his work for the Norfolk Agricultural Station but also as a member of the Board of Agricultural Studies which in the early days guided the development of the activities of the Department of Agriculture at Cambridge University.

In the account of some of the livestock changes which have occurred in Norfolk since 1780 which follows, the native breeds of cattle, sheep, pigs and horses will be considered first, and afterwards an account will be given of the changes in the methods of livestock production. The year 1780 is a convenient date on which to start, for from that time onwards books dealing especially with Norfolk agriculture have been published.

The Native Breeds

CATTLE

White Polled cattle, with black ears and nose, existed at Gunton Park in 1765 and from there between 1793 and 1810 some were taken to Blickling Hall, where they still exist; in 1887 at the Norfolk Agricultural Show "Blickling Tom" was awarded premier place. Others were sold to Albemarle Cator of Woodbastwick Hall about 1840: it is recorded that in 1919 five cows gave yields from 10,604 to 11,952 lb. of milk (Wallace, 1923). At later dates other herds were formed from these in various parks; the breed is now known as the British White.

The *Old Norfolk* breed of cattle was described by Kent in 1796 as being small with upturned horns and blood red in colour with white or mottled faces. Marshall (1787) states that they were like Herefords in miniature and were well fleshed, finishing as well at three years old as cattle in general do at four or five years. Since weighbridges were not available in those days weights were given as carcass weights: he gives the average carcass weight at three years old as 560 lb. About that time, however, bulls of the Polled Suffolk breed, which was rather better for milk, were being introduced. Youatt in 1844 figured a Norfolk Cow bred by Mr. George of Eaton which was polled.

The *Norfolk and Suffolk Red Polled* was recognized for the first time as a breed at the R.A.S.E. Show in London in 1862. A Herd Book for Red Poll cattle was begun privately and first published in 1874: the Breed Society was formed in 1888. In the early days and

until quite recently the breed, being dual-purpose, formed the main source of home-bred stock for fattening. It is a breed which, unlike most others, was never used for work purposes and so has always had early maturity. Kent (1796) in a chapter on "The advantages of working oxen" deplored the fact that no farmers used them in Norfolk; they preferred their horses which were short, compact and active. It may be noted here that the Melton herd of Red Polls was an early established and noted herd: it won the breed cup for the best Red Poll at Smithfield Show in 1885.

SHEEP

The *Old Norfolk* breed. This breed was found all over the heathlands of Norfolk, Suffolk and Cambridgeshire, where, as Kent (1796) says, it was as natural to the soil as rabbits. It was horned in both sexes and he figures a ram: it had black face and legs and they were long so that it could walk long distances to graze on poor land and stand the journey well to London where most of them were sold. It gave the best mutton on Smithfield market and was liked by butchers at that time for it gave more kidney fat than any other breed (Youatt, 1837). The wool was small in amount but of good quality. About 1800 to 1840 the land was being much improved by marling, and turnips were being widely grown. With this came the demand for a better sheep and crosses were made with the Leicester and with the Southdown. Low (1842) figures an Old Norfolk horned ewe with her black-faced polled lamb by a Southdown ram. It was this cross which was most successful and later, in 1859, was called the Suffolk breed of sheep. A few flocks of the pure breed, however, remained but the August flood of 1912 drowned that at Crown Point and Mr. Calmont's flock at Newmarket was dispersed in 1919. A few, however, were purchased and kept pure by the late Mr. J. D. Sayer of Lackford Hall, Bury St. Edmunds and now only some ten exist in the flocks of his son-in-law, Mr. W. Harvey of Howe Hall, Littlebury Green, Saffron Walden and his sister Mrs.

H. B. Smith of Wordwell Hall, Bury St. Edmunds. A ram and three ewes were recently sent to Whipsnade Zoo.

PIGS

The early writers say little about pigs in Norfolk except that they were small, white, prick-eared, fine-boned and good feeders. Youatt (1847) states that there is another small breed also resembling the Chinese which is peculiar to the county.

HORSES

The *Hackney* or *Norfolk Trotter* breed was said to have originated on the one side from the Norwegian horse, introduced by the Norse invaders, to which the Suffolk Punch is no doubt related, and on the other from the Thoroughbred (Wallace, 1923). The Stud Book was first produced in 1884.

Animal Production

STATISTICS: ENGLAND AND WALES

Before considering the position in Norfolk let us look at the general position of livestock in England and Wales over this period, as shown by the Ministry of Agriculture June returns (Table I). In 1872 there were $4\frac{1}{2}$ million cattle and in 1902 just under that number, but by 1922 the figure rose to almost 6 million, in 1942 to almost 7 million and in 1955 was just over 8 million. This rise in cattle population was no doubt due to the increasing use made of imported feeding stuffs and, towards the end of the period, to the better utilization of grass. In 1872 there were some $20\frac{1}{2}$ million sheep, but by 1902 these had fallen to $18\frac{1}{2}$ million and by 1922 to $13\frac{1}{2}$ million; since then numbers have risen to nearly 14 million in 1942 and $14\frac{3}{4}$ million in 1955. The fall to 1922 was probably due to their displacement by cattle and the decline in the practice of folding while the increase after that date was probably due to increase in grassland flocks. Pigs numbered $2\frac{1}{2}$ million in 1872 and fell to just under 2 million in 1902, probably owing to the decline in farm butter and cheese making. They rose again to $2\frac{1}{4}$ million in 1922, and with the setting up of more bacon factories and the introduction of the Pig Marketing Board they increased still further. The war put an end to this by restriction of feeding stuffs, and by 1942 there were only slightly over $1\frac{1}{2}$ million pigs. By 1955, however, the numbers had risen sharply to well over $4\frac{1}{2}$ million due to the shortage of imported beef, pigs with their high fertility rate being the quickest way of obtaining meat at short notice.

NORFOLK

Unfortunately the June returns, all that are available over this period of time, do not show the true picture in Norfolk for, with fattening cattle and sheep, animals bought in the autumn and sold before the following June are not included. One can, however, get an idea of how dairying has increased by taking the numbers of cows kept. All figures for Norfolk will be quoted in thousands. In 1882 there were about 29 and this has shown a steady rise ever since, 33 in 1902, $42\frac{1}{2}$ in 1922, $66\frac{1}{2}$ in 1942 and $71\frac{3}{4}$ in 1955. Other cattle show a decrease from 85 in 1882 to $78\frac{1}{2}$ in 1922, and thereafter an increase to 104 in 1922 and $131\frac{3}{4}$ in 1955, this increase probably being due for the most part to the rearing of replacements for dairy herds.

Very large numbers of sheep were kept in Norfolk in 1800; Youatt (1837) records that there were some 722, of which 684 were short-woolled (Old Norfolk and crosses with Southdown) and 38 long-woolled (Old Norfolk crossed Leicester). Since then breeding ewes have shown spectacular falls from $172\frac{1}{2}$ in 1902, to 95 in 1922, $44\frac{3}{4}$ in 1942, and to the low figure of $24\frac{3}{4}$ in 1955. Figures for sheep under one year show the same trend, from 225 in 1882 to 29 in 1955. The numbers of sheep entered for sale on Norwich Hill show the same drop, from $171\frac{1}{2}$ thousand in 1902 to 55 thousand in 1930. The reason for this no doubt was the decline of folded sheep and their replacement by dairy cattle, the grassland sheep not having been developed to the extent that has occurred in other parts of the country. The number of pigs in Norfolk followed in general the same course as those for England and Wales, dropping from 101 in 1882 to $85\frac{1}{2}$ in 1902; this was followed by a rise to 149 in 1922 which continued up to the war, when it dropped to 65 in 1942 and rose again afterwards to about 200 in 1955.

METHODS OF PRODUCTION

In the period about 1800, Norfolk was mainly under the well-known four-course system with turnips as the chief winter stock feed,

mangolds not yet having been introduced. Clover or clover and ryegrass one-year-leys were general, although there were some two-year-leys. Horses had first call on the hay and it was not until later that oil cakes in quantity were introduced. Since there were no railways, milk production was only for local consumption and the main animal product of Norfolk—meat—had to travel on foot to London, the chief market for it. Youatt (1844) calculated that the consumption of meat in London at that time was about 170 lb., including bones, per head per year.

CATTLE

Kent (1796) estimated that of the bullocks fattened in Norfolk at that time a quarter were home-bred, a quarter Irish, and half Scotch. These latter were driven from Scotland and sold in a succession of fairs, each of which might last a week or more: in September at Harleston, early October at Seching, the main one in mid-October at St. Faiths and in late November at Hempton Green. There was also a weekly market at Castle Hill in Norwich. The Scotch cattle were of four sorts, Galloway, Lowland, Highland and Isle of Skye, and varied in weight when fattened from 1,120 lb. (carcass weight) for the former to 420 lb. for the latter. Most were four-year-old or over steers or spayed heifers except the Isle of Skye, which were five- or six-year-olds. Some three- and two-year-olds were sold, but these were kept as stores for a year or more before being fattened. Home-breds were however finished as three-year-olds; of these Marshall (1787) states that it is the bullock which grows and fats at the same time which leaves most profit to the grazier. There were three methods of feeding. Three-quarters of the bullocks were fattened in the field, turnips being drawn and thrown out to them first on wheat stubbles, then on barley stubbles, and from Christmas to April on second-year clover leys: straw was scattered along the hedges for them and they were frequently changed from field to field. The second method was to keep them in straw yards, and the third to tie them in sheds where the turnips were chopped for them.