

# John Ellman of Glynde in Sussex

By SUE FARRANT

**B**ETWEEN 1780 and his death in 1832, John Ellman became a farmer of such repute that his presence at important agricultural gatherings was reported in the national agricultural journals along with that of such noble enthusiasts as the Duke of Bedford and the Earl of Egremont, and that he entered into correspondence with other, better-known agricultural improvers, such as Arthur Young, Coke of Norfolk, and Robert Bakewell.<sup>1</sup> Though Ellman's reputation in Sussex was that of the major publicist and improver of the Southdown sheep, there has been little assessment of how he became well known locally and nationally, and of the extent to which he contributed to the improvement of the quality of the sheep, or indeed to other aspects of husbandry.<sup>2</sup> A related question is the role of Arthur Young as publicist of Ellman's farm, and in particular his sheep, in the *Annals of Agriculture* from the mid-1780's.<sup>3</sup>

## I

John was born in 1753, the son of Richard and Elizabeth Ellman. His father farmed in the Wealden parish of Hartfield until 1761, when he became the tenant of Place Farm in Glynde, also known as Great Farm, which belonged to the Trevors, who owned most of the parish.<sup>4</sup> Richard Ellman's role in establishing the quality of the farm that John subsequently tenanted has probably been underestimated.

<sup>1</sup> For example, his presence at Holkham was noted in 'Account of Holkham Sheep Shearing', *Farmer's Magazine*, vii, Edinburgh, 1806, p. 348. J. Ellman, 'On Folding Sheep' (extract of a letter from Ellman to Sir John Sinclair), *Annals of Agriculture* (hereafter abbreviated to *Annals*), xxxviii, 1802, pp. 5-8.

<sup>2</sup> He conducted experiments as, for example, J. Ellman, 'Steeping Wheat Seed', *Annals*, xxxii, 1799, pp. 192-4.

<sup>3</sup> Ellman's farm and sheep were first mentioned in the *Annals* in 1789 in A. Young, 'A Tour Through Sussex', *Annals*, xi.

<sup>4</sup> East Sussex Record Office (hereafter abbreviated to E.S.R.O.): Glynde MS. 1908, lease of Place Farm, 1761.

The former's account book for 1779 to 1780, and his wage book from 1773 to 1780, were continued by John after 1780.<sup>5</sup> The account book suggests that Richard had already established the grazier business which John was to make very prosperous; and that he understood the importance of management of accounts, a skill which John also had, and put to good use in his own affairs and as the expeditor (or water bailiff) of Lewes and Laughton levels. John claimed that he had only two winters at school, and considered his education to be very inadequate; as an adult he read in the winter evenings with Mr Davies, the Vicar of Glynde, to improve his education.<sup>6</sup> However, his father was probably correct in assuming that the education available locally was of little value to a farmer, and that practical experience was of more importance as self-improvement was possible once the bases of education were acquired. John's articles and letters, and his success, imply an articulate and able man whose fluency belies his claim that his education was minimal.

In 1780 his father died, and John, aged twenty-seven, became the tenant of Place Farm. The parish of Glynde lies on the north side of Glynde Reach, a left-bank tributary of the river Ouse, and Lewes, the county town of east Sussex, is only three miles to the west. The Wealden farms to which downland farmers sent store sheep for the winter lie in the parishes to the north and north-east of Glynde, such as Newick and Barcombe. Access to London for sales of fatstock was good, this part of the South Downs being one of the most accessible in distance and terrain for stock to go to the capital. An additional advantage for Glynde was that the Ouse was navigable up to Lewes, and was improved during Ellman's life for both

<sup>5</sup> Sussex Archaeological Society (hereafter abbreviated to S.A.S.): HC324 (account book), HC323 (wage book).

<sup>6</sup> F. P. Walesby, *Memoir of the Late John Ellman Esq.*, 4th edn, Lewes, 1847, p. vii.

drainage and navigation, especially from the early 1790's. Glynde Reach was also improved—though the quay below the bridge was built before 1780.<sup>7</sup> Ellman grew wheat, and like other farmers in the valley probably sold it for distant markets, particularly London, the grain going down river and through the port of Newhaven.<sup>8</sup>

The 580-acre farm which Ellman acquired in 1780 included about 150 acres each of down and arable land, and about 200 acres of brookland (meadow on the floodplain), stretching from the north bank of Glynde Reach to the downland crest, a layout increasingly common to farms of over 200 acres in the valley as the result of consolidation and reorganization. Whilst in 1780 Place Farm was one of the larger farms in the valley, between 1780 and 1830 reorganization produced other farms of a comparable size, with the same mix of land types, though with varying proportions. In 1792, on renewal of the tenancy of Place Farm, Ellman leased an additional 120 acres of brookland, making the total acreage 700 acres.<sup>9</sup>

Whilst the success of tenants such as the Ellmans may have had some influence on landowners because well-cultivated large farms produced good rents, and were easier for the landlord to manage, this was not the major inducement to reorganization. Large owners in the valley included the Pelhams of Stanmer, the Marquess of Abergavenny, who resided at Erridge, and the Earl of Sheffield at Sheffield Place. The first two owned very extensive estates in the valley: the Pelham lands included the parishes of Bishopstone and Piddinghoe, and Lord Abergavenny owned Rodmell. They recognized the advantages of creating larger farms in the valley where main products were sheep, wheat, and cattle, at a time when the

prices of all were rising, and the area was well suited to their production at nationally competitive prices.

Ellman's farm was thus advantageous in type and location, and provided the opportunity for someone with initiative and ability to prosper. In particular, it was in an area in which the Southdown sheep thrived. By 1780 the district between Brighton and Eastbourne was said to produce some of the best Southdown wool. The farmers stocked sheep at one and half to the acre, a figure which Arthur Young described as unusually high, so the area may have been stocked more densely than the western downs.

The Southdown sheep was described by Arthur Young in 1788. He said that a well-bred animal had "the following points:—no horns; a long speckled face; clean and thin jaw; a long but not a thin neck; thick in the shoulder; open breasted and deep; both fore and hind legs stand wide; round and straight in the barrel; wide upon the loin and hips; shut well in the twist, which is a projection of flesh in the inner leg of the thigh, that gives a fulness when viewed behind, and makes a Southdown leg of mutton remarkable round and short, more so than in most other breeds; . . . the wool close and hard to the feel, curdled to the eye, and free from spiry projecting, or staring fibres."<sup>10</sup> Thus the animal already had features, such as the development of the rear and the quality of the wool, which Ellman and others were to accentuate by selective breeding. Furthermore, his father had already established the buying and selling of cattle and sheep, and the practice of keeping stock for others.<sup>11</sup> Unfortunately, there are no comparable local account books against which the stock prices may be compared to see whether the older Ellman was receiving better than usual prices for his stock, and whether he had begun the improvement of stock to provide a foundation on which John developed his prize flocks and herds.

## II

John, as the tenant of a large and prosperous farm, frequented Lewes market, and no doubt

<sup>7</sup> E.S.R.O.: RA/C1/3.

<sup>8</sup> J. H. Farrant, 'The Seaborne Trade of Sussex 1720-1845', in *Sussex Archaeological Collections*, CXIV, 1976, pp. 104-6.

<sup>9</sup> E.S.R.O.: Glynde MS. 1908, 1909. For general statements in this paragraph and elsewhere, see Sue Farrant, 'The Roles of Landowners and Tenants in Changing Agricultural Practice in the Valley of the River Ouse, South of Lewes, 1780-1920', unpub. Ph.D. thesis, Univ. of London, 1977.

<sup>10</sup> Young, *loc. cit.*, pp. 197-9.

<sup>11</sup> S.A.S.: HC323.

had considerable interest in agricultural matters in the county. By 1785 he was acquainted with Lord Sheffield, to whom he had sold sheep.<sup>12</sup> Sheffield respected Ellman's farming ability, and introduced him to Arthur Young, who toured Sussex in 1789 with Mr Macro, a gentleman farmer from Essex who shared Young's interest in sheep. They spent several days at Sheffield Place, and in January visited Place Farm where Young was impressed, particularly by the sheep.<sup>13</sup> Ellman expounded his belief that selective breeding was important to enhance further the best qualities of the Southdown, and offered, as evidence of his results, sheep prices to compare against those of Mr Macro. The former's average prices for 1785 to 1788 for lambs and ewes were 20 per cent higher than for 1783 to 1785, whereas Macro's price increases were only 10 per cent for crones, 2½ for lambs, and 1½ for ewes, and Ellman's stock had cost less than Macro's in 1785.<sup>14</sup> But Ellman's prices were not compared with those achieved by other local farmers, and they may have reflected a general rise in demand for the Southdown sheep, and not only the achievement of his flock.

Young asked Ellman to write an account for the *Annals* of the expenses of keeping his flock of breeding ewes. Compared with those published by the Duke of Grafton and Macro in earlier volumes, the figures are better presented and suggest rather more accurate costing, which implied a competence in management that contributed substantially towards his success.<sup>15</sup>

Ellman aimed to improve both the wool and the proportion of hindquarter mutton that his sheep would provide, and managed his flock with these aims in mind. To explain his method of management he described his flock of about 1,440 sheep in considerable detail. The breeding flock remained on the farm all year, where the

rams were also kept, but separately. As the table below shows, he had 560 breeding ewes and about 200 tegs (ewe lambs). Great care was taken of the health of this breeding flock in order that they should be fertile and produce healthy lambs. A hundred wethers were kept only to be fattened and then sold, so he was less concerned about their welfare during the winter when they were sent into the Weald for their keep; they returned in the spring for fattening. The number of sheep kept on the farm reached its peak in the late spring with all the newborn lambs and the wethers returned from the Weald. Then he began to select the breeding ewes, tegs, and ram lambs, which he would retain for the breeding flock for the next season, and wethers for winter keep. In September he made his last sales. Ellman's figures were rounded, and his allowances for the number of refused ewes, sold because they had not bred or failed to reach his criteria on appearance and wool, were surprisingly low: both factors accounted for the discrepancies in the table. However, the essentials of management were still clear, particularly the contrast between the size of the flock in the summer and in the winter. In 1789 he disposed of about 38 per cent of his summer flock, put 7 per cent out to winter keep, and retained just over 54 per cent on the farm. Conversely, his summer flock represented an increase of 84 per cent as compared with his winter flock of 760 sheep.

The breeding flock consisted of two-, three-, and four-year-old ewes, called two-, four-, and six-tooths. On the weaning of their third lamb, when they were nearly four and a half, Ellman drafted them out of the flock as old ewes to be fattened and sold, so the annual turnover was a third, about 185 ewes. Tegs, selected from the previous year's lambs, were then added to the breeding flock, and in turn more lambs were selected to replace them. In 1789 210 tegs were chosen in preparation for the following year, thus allowing for loss due to death or rejection because of poor quality of about twenty animals.

Ewes were chosen carefully, paying particular attention to the quality of wool and the

<sup>12</sup> S.A.S.: HC323. <sup>13</sup> Young, *loc. cit.*, p. 192.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 203-9.

<sup>15</sup> J. Ellman, 'An Account of the Expense and Produce of a Flock of 560 Southdown Ewes, Stating the Average for the Last Seven Years', *Annals*, XI, 1789, pp. 345-55, on which the following detailed discussion of his stock is based.

<i>Flock in late spring</i>		<i>Sales by the end of September</i>	<i>Flock for the new season</i>	
Breeding ewes	560	Old and refused	Ewes	560
less losses	6	breeding ewes		
	— 554	200		
Tegs	210			
Lambs: ewes	280	Lambs	Tegs	200
wethers	260	240	Selected ram lambs	20
rams	20		Wethers to Weald	100
	— 560			
Wethers from the Weald	100	Fattened wethers		
	1,424*	100		
		Total sold		880
		540		
Rams, kept separately	11		Rams	11
	1,435			891

\* Ellman's total = 1,400.

shape of the carcass, and the same criteria were applied to selection of rams. He wanted animals with "thick, curly wool with depth of staple, and even topped, such wool as will best defend the sheep in bad weather, from being very thick and even topped, will not admit the water to penetrate it, as it does a thin light loose wool." Ellman considered that many Southdown farmers wrongly believed the wool-buyers' claim that the quantity of wool could only be increased at the expense of the quality, and said, with a modesty typical of the period, that by careful breeding, "I believe I grow the heaviest wool between Brighthelmstone and Eastbourne, and sell for the highest price of any wool on the South Downs."

Whilst paying attention to the shape of the sheep and quality of wool he also accepted that he could not inbreed, as this would lower the standards he sought to maintain. To introduce new blood into his stock, Ellman selected fifty of the best ewes from a neighbour's stock which he judged to be of suitable quality, and drafted out thirty to forty of his own ewes because they failed his criteria of shape and wool quality or because they were sterile.

He realized that a large number of rams was unnecessary, and did not conform to the stan-

dard local practice of using twenty or so rams which were either let into the flock at the same time or left with it all year. Eleven rams were carefully chosen, and in order to plan lambing were kept separate from the flock until about 25 October. They were ranked in order of quality and introduced in threes, the three best first, then after three to five days three more, and then the remainder three to five days later.

Ellman was not the only person interested in improving the Southdown. Arthur Young remarked on the high quality of the flocks of Thomas Ellman of Shoreham (a cousin of John), and of Morris of Glynde, who also experimented with breeding from a Merino-Ryeland cross ram and Southdown ewes.<sup>16</sup> Though Ellman wrote several letters and articles on sheep for the *Annals* which gave further information about his work, generally his advice and ideas could have been those of any well-informed sheep farmer of his time. He expounded on a range of topics which included the importance of adequate winter feed, coping with ailments, and good care at

<sup>16</sup> A. Young, 'Gleanings on an Excursion to Lewes Fair', *Annals*, xvii, 1791, pp. 130, 135; A. Young, 'Some Notes at Glynde in Sussex', *ibid.*, xxxiii, 1799, p. 450.

lambling time.<sup>17</sup> Thus his role was that of a disseminator of knowledge about care of sheep, much of it applicable to all breeds. The degree to which he preached to the converted by writing for the *Annals* and other agricultural publications would need to be established before his effectiveness can be assessed.

But Ellman not only disseminated general knowledge about care of sheep but also explained why he bred selectively; and he had other valuable knowledge which it might have paid him not to publicize. For example, by 1799 he had realized that changes were more rapidly achieved by culling his breeding ewes earlier. Before 1795 he culled at four and five years old, but from about 1795 at three and four. He increased the number of ewes from over 500 to over 600, having leased extra land since 1790. The additional 100 or so ewes produced more than an extra 100 lambs, for in 1799 Ellman reported in the *Annals* that his 600 breeding ewes produced 748 lambs.<sup>18</sup> He had to provide fodder for the extra ewes, and so an earlier increase in size of flock was impractical as the smaller farm of before 1790 did not produce sufficient food.

By 1799 the Glynde rams were well known, and were let for breeding. The rams were numbered, and their age and parentage carefully noted. Arthur Young said that they were all from one parent, and remarked on the dangers of inbreeding. Nevertheless, one was let that season for 100 guineas.<sup>19</sup> They appear to have provided a considerable income, as the prices they commanded rose for much of the remainder of Ellman's farming life.<sup>20</sup>

Many Southdown farmers regarded wool as a major source of income, and were susceptible to the opinions of the dealers who purchased it. Ellman was critical of the accepted practice of agreeing to a price per tod or pound for the en-

tire stock, regardless of variations in quality, and considered that this practice encouraged the farmer to aim for quantity rather than quality, which in the long run was to the detriment of the business as the quality deteriorated and the price dropped. He argued that different types and qualities of wool should receive their due, for example hogget wool should be valued more highly than ewe wool, and that wool from the breech and underside of the animal should also be priced separately.<sup>21</sup> He was convinced that the Southdown's wool and carcass could be improved, and that the higher prices gained from better wool and more of the expensive joints from the hindquarters would provide higher, more secure profits which justified the investment and effort which he put into breeding.

Ellman received well above average prices for his wool and livestock, even after the slump in prices from 1815. But the extent to which he impressed his opinions on local farmers is unknown, though farmers on the east bank were high in Young's estimation for the quality of their husbandry.<sup>22</sup> They accepted the leadership from Glynde to the extent that most of them joined the Sussex Agricultural Society when he formed it in 1789. Arthur Young summarized Ellman's contribution to the knowledge and appreciation of the Southdown sheep, and care of sheep generally, when he wrote in 1793:

Mr. Ellman, by his knowledge of the subject, and his means for improvement has paved the way for the propagation of South Down sheep, and has added no little store to the general mass of knowledge, now afloat, upon this subject.<sup>23</sup>

### III

Ellman was also interested in improvement of other aspects of husbandry, for example cattle

<sup>17</sup> For example J. Ellman, 'On Wool', *Annals*, xli, 1804, pp. 28-39. He also wrote for other publications, e.g. J. Ellman, 'Sheep', *Baxter's Library of Practical Knowledge*, 2nd edn, Lewes, 1834.

<sup>18</sup> Young, *loc. cit.*, 1799, p. 466. <sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 448.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, numbering of rams. Reports in *Annals* of Sussex Agricultural Show indicate a rise in charges for Ellman's stock.

<sup>21</sup> Ellman, *loc. cit.*, 1804, pp. 232-4.

<sup>22</sup> A. Young, 'A Tour Through Sussex', *Annals*, xxii, 1794, p. 225: 'the road from Glynde to Eastbourne introduced me into the very centre of the finest flocks, and most spirited farmers, in this part of Sussex.'

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 326.

breeding. He won prizes for his Sussex cattle at shows and sold them to discerning gentlemen farmers. In 1797 the Earl of Darnley purchased Sussex oxen from Ellman, apparently leaving the choice of stock to the latter. In the same year Mr Clayton, Steward to the Earl of Egremont, was asked by the Earl to purchase a pair of Sussex oxen for the Duke of Bedford, who wished to compare their performance against a pair of Devonshire and a pair of Herefordshire oxen. Egremont remarked to Ellman that he wanted the best oxen available because of the importance of the experiment, and that Clayton considered one of the Glynde oxen was superior to any others he had seen. Young also approved of Ellman's stock, and said in 1799 that he owned an excellent bull and quoted its parentage: "out of Bertha, daughter of Princess Royal, by Mercury," as though knowledgeable readers were well acquainted with the stock. Ellman was convinced that the Sussex breed would eventually provide milk and beef, as required, without cross-breeding, and Young considered the quality of the cattle to have improved even in the six years since his previous visit. He noted that the younger cattle were larger than their parents.<sup>24</sup> But Ellman did not seem to devote as much effort to either the improvement of cattle or publicity of their merits, probably because there were other farmers who did so.

Improvements of arable yields, particularly of fodder crops, was important to Ellman as he needed fodders in order to support his breeding flock and cattle during the winter. He considered that his flock should aid improvement of the arable land, but remarked on the damage that sheep did in small fields by churning up the soil because folds were less easily moved round the enclosure. In 1802 he noted that on many farms sheep was an arable animal, kept and fed on the arable land, but he still kept his on the downs during the day and folded on the arable at night. He recommended twenty Southdowns to a rood per night at a value of

35s.-50s. per acre for the manure. It saved the pasture from being so soiled that the sheep could not graze it, though he remarked that Bakewell described this method of folding as robbing Peter to pay Paul.<sup>25</sup>

The arable land on Place Farm was similar in quality to that on most farms in the chalkland section of the Ouse valley. However, the quality of management may have resulted in superior yields, though other farmers on the east bank were also experimenting with the same aim. Ellman understood the importance of adequate fodder crops for the winter and spring, and attempted to solve the problem of inadequate supplies; the size of downland farms' breeding flocks was determined by the amount of winter keep that the farmer could either produce or afford to buy. Fattening stock still went into the Weald since farmers most profitably used other winter fodders as sustenance for ewes to produce stock for sale. The fattening of wethers could be done cheaply on the spare summer pastures, which were more than sufficient for the breeding flock and lambs but unsuited for hay making as the grass was too short.

Most of Ellman's arable land had a southerly aspect and, by the standards of the valley, fairly gentle slopes. The normal crop rotations in the valley included wheat, barley, oats, peas, tares, and, less frequently, beans. When the normal rotation was adapted to include turnips, coleseed, and clover is not clear, and as Young did not comment on the rotations which were used by Ellman it may be assumed that it was his standards of husbandry, rather than introduction of new crops into the area, that impressed Young. Ellman's rotations included turnips, clover and coleseed, and Young described them as based on the Norfolk system. Ellman apparently experimented with different varieties of seeds, and he recognized that whilst one strain might be unsuitable, because either the animals disliked it or the yield was low, other strains of the same crop could be successful, and he also tried different methods of cultivation. He grew what he identified as three

<sup>24</sup> Young, *loc. cit.*, 1799, p. 452; J. P. Boxall, 'The Sussex Breed of Cattle in the Nineteenth Century', *Agric. Hist. Rev.*, XVIII, 1970, pp. 17-29.

<sup>25</sup> Ellman, *loc. cit.*, 1802, p. 8.

types of round turnip, distinguished by their colour, red, white, and green, all of which were acceptable to his sheep. The crop provided winter keep, after which tares and coleseed were consumed to fill the weeks until the pasture was usable. By 1793 he had extended his range of fodder crops to include rye, ryegrass, and clover. That he did not cultivate these fodder crops before 1790 suggested that the extra land leased from that date was better suited to them.

He was prepared to try different methods of arable husbandry, and perhaps a testimony to the quality of the seed drills available in 1799 was his decision to revert to broadcast sowing. He did obtain high yields, however, as the rotation experiment reported in 1799 illustrated. In 1798 he sowed peas broadcast on a four-year-old ley, and harvested 42 bushels of peas per acre. Then after broadsharing the field, he sowed rape, had a good high yield, and followed with turnips, then wheat. Such experiments were tried elsewhere in the valley. For example, a contemporary experimented with cabbages as fodder. However, such was Ellman's standing as an acknowledged breeder that his enterprise in husbandry received publicity. He did occasionally report unsuccessful experiments, such as an attempt to aid germination by steeping wheat seed in urine, a process which killed the seed, though a weaker solution proved successful.<sup>26</sup>

Some crops he tried and judged as unsuited to the farm's requirements. Potatoes he considered to be an exhausting crop, probably because the return was small compared with that from alternative fodder or feed crops.<sup>27</sup> He was interested in agricultural equipment, and in 1797, for example, wrote to the Board of Agriculture to describe his attempts to improve flails.

He was concerned with local issues which affected a tenant's management of his farm and the return received on surrendering tenancy. In Sussex two issues remained unsolved throughout the Napoleonic period, and both

were to continue to be detrimental to the progress of agriculture, even in the late nineteenth century. The first were the trees and large hedges which surrounded fields, and though not common in most of the Ouse valley, existed in Glynde. Farmers wished to remove or reduce them as they shaded the fields and inhibited the growth of crops. An additional problem in Glynde was that the high-hedged fields were small, and could not be as efficiently cultivated as larger enclosures on similar soils. To the Trevors, Ellman's landlords, their woodland was an important source of income, and they wished to ensure that it remained such by replanting and by fairly carefully organized cutting; thus the extent to which they would allow removal was limited, though it does appear that some hedges on Ellman's farm were removed between the 1790's and the 1830's.

The second issue with which he was concerned was valuation when tenants left farms. The heavy investment by the previous tenant in cultivation was paid for by an incoming tenant and caused a reduction in the capital of the new man, though conversely the outgoing tenant could profit. Ellman believed that such a practice was ultimately inimical to husbandry particularly as it was very easily subjected to misuse by outgoing tenants who claimed that they had done more ploughings and harrowings, and applied more manure than in fact they had.<sup>28</sup> This, like removal of hedgerows, remained unresolved.

#### IV

Ellman's business affairs do not seem to be well documented, and only the two account books which were started in his father's lifetime remain. They contain useful information about his sales of stock during the 1780's, but little about arable inputs and sales, and nothing about wool. In 1780 and 1781 stock was sold either directly in Smithfield or to London dealers. In 1781 he also sold some stock at Selmeaton Sheep Fair, which was an important stock fair in the late eighteenth century. Sited at the foot of the downs it was a good meeting point for

<sup>26</sup> Ellman, *loc. cit.*, 1799, pp. 192-4.

<sup>27</sup> *Annals*, xxxiii, 1799, p. 453.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

the downland stock-rearing farmers who resided east of Lewes, the Wealden farmers and graziers, and dealers from London. Ellman also dealt at Cliffe Fair, in a suburb of Lewes, which straddled the bridge over the Ouse on to the east bank, and was easily accessible for Place Farm which lay four miles away. The route to Selmeston was easier, as it was flat, but the farm was equidistant from both markets.

In 1785 he made his first sales to an identifiable agricultural enthusiast when he sold two rams to Lord Sheffield for 10 guineas and four ewes for 18s. apiece. That the account book recorded separate sales such as these implies a more methodical record of sales for better-quality animals than for those sold at the fairs, and possibly the recorded sales were of breeding stock sold at the farm, rather than fat-stock. In 1786 he sold Sheffield 100 ewes for £95, and six ewe lambs for £37. The high price of the ewe lambs suggests that they were for breeding. His pattern of selling appears to have changed quite quickly, for by 1787 the proportion of sales to specific individuals made up over half his accounts, and references of sales to London and at the sheep fairs declined quite rapidly from this date.

Ellman utilized brookland to fatten cattle during the summer; he purchased stock from local farmers, as that in 1791 bought from Taylor of Beddingham, and from dealers. He paid Messrs Price and Jones £75 for twenty Welsh heifers in 1792, and in 1793 he bought four Devon oxen from William Small for £40. He also went to markets in order to purchase cattle, and in 1795 spent £255 on cattle bought from various people at Uckfield Fair. The fat-stock was sold in Lewes.

In addition to dealing in stock, he used his brookland during the summer to keep other people's cattle and horses. His farm was one of the few close to Lewes which included a generous proportion of brookland. Farms on the west bank, for example in Kingston and Iford, though easily accessible did not have much brook. In May 1789 he kept two horses for Sir Ferdinand Poole, a well-known local racehorse owner, and he also kept horses for

other local gentry, such as Colonel Pelham. Horses were charged 2s. 6d. per week, and cattle 1s. 6d. Cattle were sent to him from parishes farther away from Lewes, such as Bishopstone at the southern end of the valley, from where Edmund Catt of the Tidemills sent cattle in 1782.

It was during the 1790's that Ellman's sales of sheep to well-known people were firmly established as the major part of his turnover. In 1794 he sold sheep to the Earl of Egremont, Ferdinand Poole, the Earl of Shaftesbury, and Lord Gage of Firle. He had apparently sold stock also to Coke of Holkham. In 1806 Coke attributed his decision to stock Southdowns instead of Leicesters to the influence of Ellman, who had persuaded him of the superiority of Southdowns about fifteen years earlier.<sup>29</sup> Coke purchased 500 Southdowns (and probably, therefore, at least some from Ellman), and in order to persuade his local farmers to stock them, sold them locally. Coke concluded, after thirteen years' experience, that the Southdown breed was more profitable than the Leicester, though he thought highly of the latter. In 1798 the Emperor of Russia ordered two Glynde rams, asking King George III to obtain them for him. Ellman apparently asked the Duke of Bedford to fix a fair price for them, and they agreed on 300 guineas; the Duke purchased two for his own stock at the same price.<sup>30</sup>

References to sales of wool were infrequent, though Young was complimentary about the Glynde product and said that the area of downland between Eastbourne and Brighton, which included Place Farm, produced the finest quality Southdown wool.<sup>31</sup> Until Lewes Wool Fair was started in 1786 by Lord Sheffield there was little organization of wool sales, farmers dealing directly from their farms with travelling wool staplers. The major flock masters

<sup>29</sup> John Ellman, Glynde, to T. W. Coke, 2 Nov. 1803, uncatalogued, Holkham Muniment Room; letter quoted by R. A. C. Parker, *Coke of Norfolk*, Oxford, 1975, p. 121.

<sup>30</sup> F. P. Walesby, 'Memoir of John Ellman', *The Library of Agricultural and Horticultural Knowledge*, Lewes, 1836, p. xxx.

<sup>31</sup> Rev. A. Young, *General View of the Agriculture of Sussex*, 1813, p. 311.



from the downs then attended the fair, which apparently achieved Sheffield's aim of establishing price agreements. His practice of collecting information on the state of the wool trade, and delivering a speech at the dinner held before selling began, must have provided a useful education on the impact of extraneous factors on the price of wool.<sup>32</sup> By this date good Southdown wool had already acquired a reputation for high quality, and so efforts to obtain a price that was commensurate seemed worth while.

## V

Ellman acquired considerable influence locally, partly because of his reputation as a successful sheep breeder, but also because he appreciated the value of participation in local affairs related either to his desire to publicize the Southdown sheep or to the improvement of his farm. He also participated in agricultural events of national importance.

Not only was Ellman tenant of the largest farm on the Trevor estate, but from 1792 until 1829 he was steward of their Sussex estates in the parishes of Beddingham, Glynde, Denton, and Tarring Neville on the east bank of this section of the river Ouse, and in the Weald, including land in the parish of Ringmer, just north-east of Glynde.<sup>33</sup> He was a good choice, an able farmer with a strong interest in commercial agriculture, whose farm included most of the types of soil to be found on other Trevor lands. Glynde was also more wooded than the other Ouse land, so Ellman may have had some awareness of the plight of farmers in the Weald. During the years of his stewardship the Trevors reorganized and extended their estates, creating farms on the downland areas as extensive as Ellman's farm.

He had considerable influence in the parish of Glynde and in the Firle Poor Law Union to which Glynde belonged. He exhibited a paternal attitude towards the workforce and tried to alleviate their lot when, as in the 1790's, food prices were high, for example by selling flour

to them at a reduced price.<sup>34</sup> Though he tried to ensure that there was full employment, the combination of Trevor dominance of the parish and his watchful eye probably ensured that the village was closed to people surplus to local needs. That in his reports he is able to remark on the small degree of unemployment further supports this.<sup>35</sup>

The Commission of Sewers for Lewes and Laughton Levels was responsible for drainage of the floodplain of the lower Ouse, which included Ellman's brookland in Glynde Reach. Glynde Reach was frequently presented by the jury of the Watercourt as requiring repair, particularly shoring up of the banks. Ellman may have encouraged presentment to ensure that neighbours, especially in Beddingham and Firle opposite, contributed to the upkeep, for as early as 1780 he was sworn on to the jury, and in July 1783 he became the Expenditor of the Levels.<sup>36</sup> Some reorganization was implied by Ellman's appointment, as prior to this the water-bailiff supervised the collection of the waterscot and the expenditure. In addition to being responsible for collection and expenditure, Ellman organized and supervised a considerable amount of work undertaken on the Reach and in the valley, and provided estimates of improvements.<sup>37</sup> He retained this post until he retired from farming in 1828, and apparently combined it with his interest in the Lower Ouse Navigation. In the early 1790's, when estimates were being made of the cost of improving the navigation on the river south of Lewes, Ellman submitted a comprehensive estimate, presumably for comparison against tenders submitted by those who wished to undertake the work.<sup>38</sup> His role in the improvement of drainage and navigation on the Ouse is underrated, due to fragmentary evidence.

Ellman was interested in the improvement of

<sup>34</sup> In a reply to Young, Ellman said that he had had barley ground for the poor to ensure the availability of flour they could afford: *Annals*, xxxiv, 1800, p. 166.

<sup>35</sup> E.g. in response to Young's circulars, reported in the *Annals*, and in *Farmer's Magazine* for which he wrote the county report.

<sup>36</sup> E.S.R.O.: RA/C1/3.

<sup>37</sup> E.S.R.O.: D187.

<sup>38</sup> E.S.R.O.: D187.

<sup>32</sup> 'Account of Lewes Wool Fair', *Farmer's Magazine*, viii, Edinburgh, 1807, p. 399.

<sup>33</sup> E.S.R.O.: Glynde MS. 2825.

standards of husbandry, but also recognized that his efforts were a way of promoting his own work and generating demand for his livestock. In 1798 he was involved in the foundation of the Sussex Agricultural Society.<sup>39</sup> By 1796 Ellman had considered starting a cattle show and agricultural society at Lewes, and the Earl of Egremont wrote to congratulate him on the idea. Egremont had already started a show at Petworth (in west Sussex), but recognized that Lewes was a superior location and accessible to a greater proportion of the downland.<sup>40</sup> In a letter to the *Annals* Ellman described the aims of the Sussex Agricultural Society: "I hope and flatter myself that this institution has, and will have, a wonderful effect on convincing Southdown farmers of the necessity of attending to the improvement of the Southdown sheep."<sup>41</sup> He also noted the value of holding an annual show because of the importance of comparison: "I believe it the general opinion of most breeders, that their own stock is the best, but by comparing them with others, they discover their mistake."<sup>42</sup>

He recognized that patrons were of great value, and secured the support of local nobility and gentry such as Lord Pelham, Lord Sheffield, the Trevors, and the Gages and Egremont from Petworth, and this gave the society the status necessary to attract substantial support from the local farmers. The list of members included many of the farmers of the downland between Brighton and Eastbourne and nearly every occupier of a large farm in the Ouse valley. His influence in the valley, particularly on the east bank, as a successful tenant-farmer, and as steward for nearly half the farms on it, was important.<sup>43</sup>

The sheep classes were restricted to Southdowns only, but the cattle classes were not restricted to the Sussex breed. This distinction

was pointed out in an anonymous letter published in the *Annals* which implied that whilst the local farmers accepted that superiority of the Sussex cattle was indisputable and hence did not close the classes, they were less confident about the pre-eminence of the Southdown sheep.<sup>44</sup> Tireless in his efforts to promote the Southdown, Ellman organized sweepstakes at the show, with the revenue divided into prizes for various categories of sheep.<sup>45</sup>

The show served John Ellman well: in 1800 he let three rams for the season for 210 guineas, won the sweepstake for the best pair of ewes, and the prize for the best four-year-old Sussex bull.<sup>46</sup> Such publicity was invaluable. In the final decade of his farming life, however, he entered less stock shows, possibly, as contemporaries explained, in order to give others the opportunity to win. Though this worthy motive was no doubt part of the reason, he no longer required this kind of publicity since his reputation was firmly established.<sup>47</sup> Indeed, the quality of sheep may have improved to the point at which his pre-eminence was no longer unchallenged.

County administration also claimed his time: he first became involved as a member of the militia in 1803 at a meeting called by the Lieutenant of the county, responsible for the organization of the defence of Sussex against Napoleon. At the meeting the parishes were grouped into seventy-eight districts, and to each an inspector was appointed for the purpose of supervising the superintendants who were appointed to each parish. He apparently fulfilled the criteria of being a "Gentleman of some weight and influence in the neighbourhood" for he was made an inspector.<sup>48</sup> By 1814 he was appointed a deputy lieutenant of the county, and held the post until at least 1820.<sup>49</sup>

His most important national role was as a founder member of the Smithfield Society in

<sup>39</sup> Report on the 'Smithfield Society', *Farmer's Magazine*, xviii, Edinburgh, 1807.

<sup>40</sup> J. Ellman, letter 'To the Right Honourable Earl of Egremont', *Annals*, xxvii, 1796, pp. 630-1.

<sup>41</sup> Show at Lewes reported in *Annals*, xxvii, 1796, pp. 623-5.

<sup>42</sup> 'Lewes Agricultural Show', *Annals*, xxi, 1795, p. 392.

<sup>43</sup> 'Show of Cattle at Lewes', *Annals*, xxix, 1797, p. 84.

<sup>44</sup> Anon., 'To the Subscribers for the Improvement of Cattle and Sheep at Lewes', *Annals*, xxix, 1797, pp. 262-5.

<sup>45</sup> Show at Lewes, reported in *Annals*, xxvii, 1796, p. 627.

<sup>46</sup> 'Show of Cattle and Sheep at Lewes', *Annals*, xxxv, 1800, p. 552.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.* <sup>48</sup> E.S.R.O.: LCG/3/EW. <sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

1798. The aim of this society was to encourage the most cost-effective methods of rearing and fattening fatstock; the annual meeting was held in mid-December, the most important time at Smithfield, when stock was sold for Christmas.<sup>50</sup> Stock was weighed, live and dead, and the proportions of meat and by-products compared; the fattening history of the animal had to be testified to prevent dishonesty. Animals bred by Ellman won prizes, as in 1807 when three one-shear Southdown wethers purchased from Ellman as lambs in October 1806 by H. King of Essex, and grazed on open marshland without shelter, won the 10 guineas prize.<sup>51</sup>

Nationally the breeder attended agricultural meetings of national importance held at centres for the agricultural enthusiast such as Woburn, Holkham, and Petworth; his presence was noted in reports of the events in agricultural journals such as the *Annals* from the early 1790's. He also judged at such events: in 1812 he was invited to attend the show of the Shropshire Agricultural Society as a judge of farms, but apparently he had attended this show and the Hertfordshire Society's show as a judge and guest of the Duke of Bridgewater for some years before.<sup>52</sup>

In 1821 the Select Committee on the distressed state of agriculture was convened. Ellman's evidence supplies a summary of the economic changes of the period 1780 to 1820, and their impact on the eastern South Downs.<sup>53</sup> Between 1780 and about 1815 the entire valley was very prosperous, and he remarked about the year 1811, "agricultural produce was selling higher than at any other period I recollect." In 1820 he leased two farms which totalled 1,400 acres in Glynde, and occupied about four-fifths of the parish; one farm he had tenanted for forty years since 1780, and had extended it in 1790. When his lease expired in 1811 his rent

was increased by 88 per cent from £680 to £1,200, and probably he experienced one of the greatest increases in the valley, though all tenants whose leases expired between 1800 and 1814 had to pay considerably more on renewal. When the slump came, he, in common with others, received his first abatement: his rent was reduced by £200 to £1,000 at which level it continued in the early 1820's.

His habit of keeping accounts provided the Commission with evidence of the impact of falling prices in the area, but his general remarks on causes of problems and possible solutions are not as perceptive as those of his son, John Ellman junior, who also gave evidence to the Commission.<sup>54</sup> John senior wished to reduce the cost of labour, blamed jobbers for unfavourable prices, and insisted that they were buying imported cereals at lower prices. He requested a higher price for imported and home-grown grain to recompense the farmer for his investment in agriculture; thus Ellman seemed to want protection. He attributed progress in agriculture and increased output to increased capital investment rather than to technical change.

Ellman was secure and still farmed profitably; his own reputation, built up during the thirty years from 1780 to 1810 when the agriculture of the region was well suited to the demands of the time, ensured that his livestock continued to command good prices. In 1829 he retired, having received such accolades as a silver cup presented to him in 1800 by land-owners in Sussex, a silver vase in 1805 as a personal gift from the Duke of Bedford for his advice, the Board of Agriculture's gold medal in 1819 for the best cultivated farm in Sussex, and a silver salver from John Fuller and others in 1829.<sup>55</sup> He had frequently won prizes, especially for his sheep, at shows in Lewes and London. Ellman sold his stock, retired to a small estate he owned in Uckfield, and died in Lewes in 1832; his son John took over the farm, having previously tenanted a farm nearby.

Ellman senior's main role was that of a dis-

<sup>50</sup> 'Smithfield Club', *Farmer's Magazine*, viii, Edinburgh, 1807, p. 189.

<sup>51</sup> 'Sussex Agricultural Society', *Annals*, xxix, 1797, pp. 587, 604. John Ellman won prizes for the second-best bull, best Southdown ram, second-best Southdown ewe, and joint first prize for the best Southdown wether.

<sup>52</sup> 'Woburn Sheep Shearing', *Annals*, xl, p. 486.

<sup>53</sup> *B.P.P.*: 1821 (668), ix, pp. 49-61.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 110-24.

<sup>55</sup> Walesby, *op. cit.*, 4th edn, 1847, pp. lii, lx.

seminator of agricultural knowledge, especially about sheep, though the extent to which he alone improved the breed may be questionable. He was aided by the favourable assessment of both Arthur Young and his son, who reported his progress as a breeder when they visited the

locality, and also published his articles and notes. He publicized the Southdown at a time when it was suited to the needs of sheep-corn farms on light soils in a period of exceptional prosperity for them, and this was undoubtedly a major determinant of his success.