

# Holly as a Fodder in England\*

By MARTIN SPRAY

*Lyarde es ane olde horse. . . . He salle be  
putt into the parke holyne for to gnawe* ['Lyarde' c1440]

I  
ATTENTION was drawn by Radley<sup>1</sup> to the importance of the woody evergreen holly (*Ilex aquifolium*) as a winter fodder for sheep, from at least the thirteenth to the early eighteenth century, in the southern Pennine region of the English North Midlands. He comments that 'the practice of feeding animals on holly seems to have been confined primarily to the grits and sandstones' of that area, where the acidic soils allowed — and still allow — only very poor grazing and little winter bite. His references are largely to documents in the Sheffield City Archives. He concludes, however, that place-name evidence may indicate that the practice was more widespread than this localization in the Pennine foothills of North Derbyshire and South Yorkshire.

A more extensive search of the Sheffield archives has been made, and its conclusions published locally.<sup>2</sup> This confirmed the importance of the practice in this area, and its continuance up to the middle of the eighteenth century. Although it is well recorded, it is not well remembered. Local farmers of the very sites where holly was formerly encouraged are (predictably) sceptical of its palatability and use as a fodder.

That holly is palatable to the larger herbivores, and is likely to be subject to browsing, is clear from the plant itself — it is well armed. Cattle, horses, sheep, and goats frequently browse it casually. However, the evidence for its exploitation elsewhere in Britain is at best mostly cryptic. Its use in

Europe also is not clear, although there are incidental references to the practice in north-west France.<sup>3</sup> Several other woody plants, evergreen and deciduous, are attested fodders in Britain, in some cases better documented than holly.

Heather or Ling (*Calluna vulgaris*), of course, is still extensively grazed by large numbers of sheep. It is interesting to reflect on the evidence that the 'weed' gorse (*Ulex europaeus*, and the two smaller species to a less extent) was formerly widely sown as a regular cattle and horse fodder.<sup>4</sup> It was even used in field rotations as a nitrogen restorer. Broom and whins (*Sarothamnus scoparius* and *Genista* spp) were much less important.

Ivy (*Hedera helix*), whose medicinal qualities are still occasionally remembered,<sup>5</sup> was much recommended by Roman agriculturalists, and is still gathered in some Mediterranean areas. In northern Europe it has long been important;<sup>6</sup> and the abundance of its pollen in some Mesolithic settlements indicates its

suggestion that they feed their stock on holly: their positiveness was useful.

<sup>1</sup>J Radley, 'Holly as a Winter feed', *Agric Hist Rev*, IX, 1961, pp 89–92.

<sup>2</sup>M Spray and D J Smith, 'The rise and fall of holly in the Sheffield region', *Trans Hunter Archaeol Soc*, X, 1977, pp 239–51.

<sup>3</sup>Eg J Lindley and T Moore, *Treasury of Botany*, 1866 (for sheep); *Ency Brit*, 13th edn (for cattle).

<sup>4</sup>Eg A G Tansley, *The British Islands and their Vegetation*, Cambridge, 1939 (for Wales); C J Robb, letter in *Country Life*, 15 May 1958, p 1079 (for Ireland). There are many references to its growth, and milling to make it more acceptable, eg C P Johnson, *The useful Plants of Great Britain*, 1867; S Ely 'On the cultivation of gorse as a food for cattle', *J R A S E*, 1st ser, VI, 1848, pp 523–8.

<sup>5</sup>G Millar, letter *Farmers' Weekly*, 9 January 1976, p 45. Several personal correspondents knew of its use, one from Dyfed having actually used it. Johnson, op cit, notes its use in antiquity.

<sup>6</sup>J Troels-Smith, 'Ivy, mistletoe and elm: climatic indicators — fodder plants', *Danm Geol Unders*, Rk IV, Nr 4, 1960, pp 1–32.

\*I am especially grateful to Dennis Smith for his time spent with the Sheffield City Archives, and to Arthur Lord for his pragmatic comments. Reference is made in the footnotes to much valuable correspondence. I would also wish to thank the several farmers who looked aghast at the

importance as a winter stock feed here.<sup>7</sup> In Europe, Mistletoe (*Viscum album*) was gathered;<sup>8</sup> but it has probably never been sufficiently abundant in Britain.

It is quite clear that for a long period woodland grazing was of critical importance to stock rearing in Britain. Even in the Middle Ages, 'the cow appears . . . to be mainly associated with forests and upland ranges . . .',<sup>9</sup> and the forests were carefully used. Only with the growing importance of sheep did 'open' grazings predominate in much of the country — ironically leading to their eventual degradation over vast areas, and the advent of heather grazings. Cox remarks that of all browsewood cut and taken to stock in the Royal Forest oaks (*Quercus robur* and *petraea*) were especially important.<sup>10</sup> Prehistorically and historically, elms (*Ulmus*) were the mainstay of many stock animals, foliage being gathered from pollards throughout the growing season, and the winter fodder being provided from autumn gatherings. This practice seems to account to some extent for the controversial 'Elm Decline' in northern Europe.<sup>11</sup> Troels-Smith notes that as late as the end of the nineteenth century some Norwegian farmers wintered their animals largely on dried elm leaves.<sup>12</sup>

Ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*) is highly palatable, and provided another useful cattle and sheep fodder, often used in Britain.<sup>13</sup> Many other species are also eaten, and were doubtless resorted to in severe weather. All these, of course, as well as bushes such as the well-armed hawthorns (*Crataegus monogyna* and

*oxyanthoides*) and Blackthorn (*Prunus spinosa*), and the subwoody brambles (*Rubus fruticosus*) and roses (*Rosa* spp), are browsed by deer, and were often lopped for them.

If the difficulties of wintering stock in Britain are still considerable, they were formerly always critical. Summer grazings in the lowlands usually provided an adequate diet, but normally left little for the winter. The better organized farms could provide some conserved grass, and grains and pulses. But by midwinter these feeds were usually running short: the post-medieval farmer was still well advised to cut browse for his animals. His difficulties in the uplands were commonly desperate because of lack or inaccessibility of grazing:

The milch cows and sheep which were housed had to starve on straw, boiled chaff, mashed whins [presumably largely gorse], dry benty grass [*Agrostis*] and coarse rushes that had been cut in autumn from the marsh lands, with an occasional sheaf of oats during the months of February and March when they had reached the limits of endurance. Those that survived [an estimated 1 in 5 did not, each winter] . . . often had to be carried [to the pasture].<sup>14</sup>

Availability of adequate fresh browse must have added greatly to the value of land, and the chances of overwintering stock.

It seems surprising that the former importance of woody winter fodders is now hardly remembered — indeed, that many stockfarmers do not realize that their animals *can* eat woodland browse. The drought summers of the mid-1970s brought many revelations: some farmers in desperation experimented with whatever trees were available.

## II

Although no extensive search for references in early farming texts has been made, as represented by modern authors they seem to be silent on holly fodder — perhaps suggestive of restricted usage or early

<sup>7</sup>I G Simmons and G W Dimbleby, 'The possible role of ivy (*Hedera helix* L.) in the Mesolithic economy of Western Europe', *J Archaeol Sci*, 1, 1974, pp 291–6.

<sup>8</sup>Troels-Smith, loc cit.

<sup>9</sup>R A Donkin, 'Cattle on the estates of mediaeval Cistercian monasteries', *Econ Hist Rev*, 2nd ser, XV, 1962, pp 31–53.

<sup>10</sup>J C Cox, *The Royal Forests of England*, 1905.

<sup>11</sup>For Britain see H Godwin *History of the British Flora*, Cambridge, 2nd edn, 1975; R E Sims, 'The anthropogenic factor in East Anglian vegetational history: an approach using A.P.F. techniques', in H J B Birks and R G West (eds), *Quaternary Plant Ecology*, Oxford, 1973.

<sup>12</sup>loc cit.

<sup>13</sup>Eg Johnson, op cit.

<sup>14</sup>J E Handley *Scottish Farming in the Eighteenth Century*, 1953.

neglect.<sup>15</sup> Discussion of 'browse wood', however, is general; for example Tusser advises the lopping of 'all manner of trees' in January.<sup>16</sup> He also refers specifically to gorse, broom, ivy, and mistletoe. Early woodland and forestry texts are similarly silent. Neither Manwood nor Evelyn discusses holly in this context; and the early Welsh laws also seem not to note it.<sup>17</sup>

In Britain, perhaps the best-known reference to the cutting of holly for stock is the diarist Abraham de la Pryme's note of 20 November 1696, referring to the Bradfield and Hope Woodland areas to the west of Sheffield.<sup>18</sup> He and Glover indicate that holly was deliberately planted for this purpose.<sup>19</sup> These are both late references, however.

In this district, as may be inferred from the will of Henry de Birley, the franklin, in 1391, every man's wealth was in sheep, and these during the greater part of the year required but little attention. Once, or sometimes twice a week, the owner rode out through chase or moorland, to look over his stock. . . . For the most part, even in winter, they fended for themselves, eating the last year's grass, finding herbage and roots amongst gorse and heather or beneath the thorn bushes, breaking ash boughs and peeling them from top to bottom, feeding greedily upon the bark and smooth leaves of the holly branches, lopped for them by the shepherd's axe.<sup>20</sup>

Radley quotes a Sheffield area deed of 1320, and a Hope, Derbyshire, reference of the early thirteenth century. Local records show that the practice was quite important in the first half of the seventeenth century, after which its use seems to have declined rapidly.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>15</sup>Eg G E Fussell, *The English Dairy Farmer 1500-1900*, 1966; J Thirsk (ed), *The Agrarian History of England and Wales, IV, 1500-1640*, Cambridge, 1967; R Trow-Smith, *A History of Livestock Husbandry to 1700*, 1957. Thirsk notes the Furness usage.

<sup>16</sup>Thomas Tusser, *Five hundreth good pointes of husbandry* . . . , 1573.

<sup>17</sup>John Manwood, *A Treatise of the Lawes of the Forest* [1598]; John Evelyn, *Sylva* . . . , 1664. For the Welsh laws see W Linnard, 'Forests and forestry in the ancient Welsh Laws', *QJ Forestry*, LXX, 1976, pp 38-43.

<sup>18</sup>*Diary in Trans Surtees Soc*, LIV, 1870, p 168.

<sup>19</sup>S Glover, *History and Gazetteer of the County of Derby*, Derby, 1831.

<sup>20</sup>G R Sitwell *The Hurts of Holdsworth*, Oxford, 1930.

<sup>21</sup>See Spray and Smith, loc cit.

There are some early eighteenth-century references, and a few up to the late 1730s. 'Hollin rents', ranging from five or six shillings to £1 16s 0d a year, are noted in some rentals from the 1720s and '30s. This is roughly the same range as that of rentals in the same area in the 1630s and '40s. By the early eighteenth century, in the Sheffield area, holly was much less esteemed than formerly. An agreement in 1737 to rent holly bushes on a 21-year lease, seems to have been optimistic.<sup>22</sup> From before that time there are references to the grubbing of holly trees, and attempts to increase the amount of grass pasture, eg:

6th January 1710/11: Expense y<sup>t</sup> day with Mr Ashmore [woodward] and others, going again to Bradfield parish and endeavouring to sett y<sup>e</sup> Hollins, Mr. Banks having burned and destroyed a great part therof — 1/6d.<sup>23</sup>

It is interesting to note that Thomas Pennant, travelling in the Lake District in 1772, was surprised near Hawkeshead when he 'in one place observed a *Holly park*, a tract preserved entirely for sheep . . .'.<sup>24</sup>

Nearly all the southern Pennine records examined concern the feeding of holly to sheep, which were the predominant stock of the area. Occasional references to its use as a fodder for deer occur, however. Within the same parish of Bradfield there are records in the 1660s of the 'red Deare of the High Mores': in 1667 £1 6s 8d was paid as a rent for some bushes from which to fodder them.<sup>25</sup>

Besides examining the southern Pennine material, Spray and Smith, like Radley, suggest that the use of holly as a *regular* winter fodder may have been widespread in England. This paper attempts to indicate the likely extent of the practice. Although no other area appears to have been investigated in detail, there are many scattered references to

<sup>22</sup>Sheffield City Libraries, ACM S377.

<sup>23</sup>Sheffield City Libraries, ACM S161.

<sup>24</sup>*Tour of Scotland, 1772, 1774-6*.

<sup>25</sup>Sheffield City Libraries, Ronksley Collection 159, no 11549; and again in 1669 (no 11550).

the practice in the literature. The instances noted below must be regarded as rather random 'finds'.

Although, like de la Pryme's note, it indicates an unfamiliarity, the quotation from Pennant suggests a well-established north-western usage. Besides Pennant, Thomas West's remarks<sup>26</sup> that in Furness 'this custom has never been discontinued', and that 'the holly trees are carefully preserved for that purpose, where all other wood is cleared off, and large tracts of common pasture are so covered with these trees, as to have the appearance of a forest of hollies', indicate that the species was still important in the Lake District in the 1770s: '. . . a stranger unacquainted with this practice would imagine the holly-bush to have been sacred amongst fellanders'. Indeed, in severe winters in this century holly has been lopped by Cumbrian shepherds.<sup>27</sup>

South of the Lake District, in Bowland, holly was for a long period cut both by foresters, for deer, and by farmers for their stock.<sup>28</sup> Sales are recorded for 1295-6. 'Most of Bowland Chase was planted with holly';<sup>29</sup> although by the seventeenth century much of this seems to have been removed, and a 1556 survey notes that

all the residue of the woods of Bolland are olde hollyns, olde heythornes, olde hassiles, olde crabtrees and oller [alder] wood, all of which except the oller wood, on account of great age and cropping are worth nothing.<sup>30</sup>

Holly is still fairly plentiful in the area, especially in hedges.

Further south again, still within the Lancaster Forest area, are records from West Derby, where in the 1290s tenants were

making 2s yearly payments for holly fodder. 'All the men of West Derby paid for holly in the forinsec [limited pasturage] woods.' The amount paid was about the same as that for free range pasturage in the forest. To the east of the Cheshire Plain, holly seems to have been of some importance in the Macclesfield Forest area. References to the getting of winter holly (Med Latin *husseiam* and *hus*) occur in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.<sup>31</sup> One of them records that in 1358-59 8d was paid for cutting holly for certain weak animals of Macclesfield Manor. This, of course, is close to the southern end of the Pennines in Derbyshire, where, as noted earlier, records are frequent.

There are also south Derbyshire references. For example, at Duffield some tenants and copyholders in the late sixteenth century had the duty and the right 'in winter to lop hollice and other undergrowth for relief of the queens game when there were deer, and for their own cattle and sheep. . . .'<sup>32</sup> Elsewhere in the county, in 1632, copyholders were charged with combination to defeat manorial privileges, by claiming a similar right.<sup>33</sup>

Information from the more eastern parts of the north of England appears to be less readily found. No reference to the practice in the North York Moors has come to light, although in exceptionally snowy winters in this century holly has been cut for sheep on some farms. A more systematic search would doubtless discover records in this area. For the northern and middle Pennines, also, records seem sparse. However, in Nidderdale, near Harrogate, indictments for removing holly from woodland were recorded in 1296-97.<sup>34</sup> Later, 'the Holyngplace near Pateley [Pateley] Bridge' was rented by various tenants for 20s a year, in 1531-32. Local

<sup>26</sup> *Antiquities of Furness*, 1774, quoted in W H Pearsall and W Pennington, *The Lake District*, 1973. West — amongst others — noted that 'mutton so fed has a remarkable fine flavour'.

<sup>27</sup> Eg Pearsall and Pennington, *op cit.* Interestingly, the deer of this area diet extensively on juniper (R S J Chad, 'The red deer of Furness Fells' *Forestry*, XXXIX, 1966, pp 135-50.)

<sup>28</sup> R C Shaw, *The Royal Forests of Lancaster*, Preston, 1956.

<sup>29</sup> Shaw, *pers comm.*

<sup>30</sup> Shaw, *op cit.*

<sup>31</sup> Information from B C Redwood, County Archivist.

<sup>32</sup> Cox, *op cit.*

<sup>33</sup> G E Hurt *Notes & Queries*, 10th ser, XII, p 428. The manor is not named.

<sup>34</sup> B Jennings (ed), *A History of Nidderdale*, Huddersfield, 1967.

rights, however, were not clear: several disputes over grazing and cutting rights are noted in the Fountains Abbey records. 'Holly . . . was not generally regarded as a common right in Nidderdale. The tenants of Hartwith and Winsley paid extra rents both before and after the dissolution for the right to take holly, and a share in the latter was conveyed with the farms in the 1570s.' Holly was there cut for cattle and sheep.

Early records of Bolton Priory suggest that, as a supplement to grain and other dry feed, holly leaves may have been very important.<sup>35</sup> South Yorkshire searches have shown some incidental records from the Leeds area; but their number suggests that a thorough scrutiny might yield fewer than the comparable search in the Sheffield archives.

From the north-east Midlands lowlands no references have come to light.

South of the north Midlands evidence for the importance of holly comes from at least two areas: Shropshire and Staffordshire, and the New Forest. For the latter, where holly is abundant, Tubbs draws attention to the continued importance of holly for deer and the feral ponies, both as natural browse and as loppings in winter.<sup>36</sup> Young holly growth is often severely suppressed as a result of browsing and mature trees characteristically exhibit a 'browse line'. Also in Hampshire, in Bere Forest, deer were traditionally fed with 'holly, ivy and the tips of thorn bushes, when the season required it'.<sup>37</sup>

In both these instances the emphasis is on providing for deer and for the New Forest ponies.<sup>38</sup> Similarly, in Needwood Forest near

Burton-upon-Trent, William Pitt noted at the end of the eighteenth century that holly 'in great abundance, has been nursed up and encouraged in growth, I suppose, as winter provender for the deer'.<sup>39</sup> To the west, in Shropshire, is an unusual growth of the species at Stiperstones. It has been suggested that this is a relict holly plantation similar to those of the southern Pennines.<sup>40</sup> The Hollies is a stand of pollards estimated at 200 or more years old, and thus containing some of the most ancient holly trees in Britain. They seem to have been pollarded up to the middle of the nineteenth century. In parts of the Midlands, especially in Shropshire, hollies were often left in hedges for the cutting of browse and berries. 'Such trees are more frequent in the hedgerows surrounding the small fields associated with smallholdings than in the field boundaries of larger farm units'.<sup>41</sup>

Besides these last two locations, there is tantalizing evidence from Essex. Addy concludes from a 1222 record that cows and pigs were there sometimes fed on holly:<sup>42</sup>

In pratis sunt ibi . xxvij . acre falcabiles et . xl . acre in pastura de holin . possunt esse ibi in pastura . xxx . vacce cum suis tauris et fetibus , et . v . sues cum suis verris et fetibus .

This reference to pigs seems to be singular. He notes, moreover, the recording of two payments at Beauchamp in 1181:

Golstanus et Herueius . j . hollinam pro xij d Robertus filius Alwini holemede pro xij d

reading both *hollinam* and *holemede* as 'holly pasture'.

Reference to a famous piece of Welsh literature is worth making here. The early

<sup>35</sup>I Kershaw, *Bolton Priory: the economy of a northern Monastery, 1286-1325*, Oxford, 1973.

<sup>36</sup>C R Tubbs, *The New Forest: an ecological history*, Newton Abbot, 1968. Both leaves and bark seem to be most palatable a day or two after cutting. He stresses also the feeding by ponies, deer and cattle on ivy and cut gorse. V Russell (*New Forest Ponies*, Newton Abbot, 1976) makes little mention of holly. The abundance of holly in the New Forest may be a fairly recent phenomenon (see Tubbs).

<sup>37</sup>Cox, *op cit*, quoting a 1792 Commissioners' Report.

<sup>38</sup>William Cobbett, during his younger years working at Farnham in the 1770s, apparently spent time grinding holly to make it more acceptable to domestic stock.

<sup>39</sup>W Pitt, *General View of the Agriculture of the County of Stafford*, 1st edn, 1796, quoted in E S Edees, *Flora of Staffordshire*, Newton Abbot, 1972.

<sup>40</sup>G F Peterken, 'The Hollies, Stiperstones', *Shropshire Conservation Trust Bull.*, XI, 1967, pp 12-13.

<sup>41</sup>G F Peterken and P S Lloyd, 'Biological Flora of the British Isles. *Ilex aquifolium* L.', *J Ecol.*, LV, 1967, pp 841-58. Holly sometimes grows in very wet conditions, in Alder communities for example. At Stiperstones it is associated with *Sphagnum*.

<sup>42</sup>O S Addy *Notes & Queries*, 8th ser, XI, p 304: for 'Domesday of St. Paul's' [1222] see *Camden Soc Trans.*, LIX, 1858. A further search of Essex material has not been attempted.

thirteenth-century tale *The Dream of Rhonabwy* includes an enlightening insight into medieval life.<sup>43</sup>

And as they came towards the house, they could see a black old hall with a straight gable end, and smoke a-plenty from it. And when they came inside, they could see a floor full of holes and uneven. Where there was a bump upon it, it was with difficulty a man might stand thereon, so exceeding slippery was the floor with cows' urine and dung. Where there was a hole, a man might go over the ankle, what with the mixture of water and cow dung, and branches of holly a-plenty on the floor after the cattle had eaten off their tips.

Welsh records have not been sought; but it may be that this is a characteristic scene. The pure holly stands of the Black Mountain may also be relict hags.<sup>44</sup> In the Forest of Dean keepers cut holly for deer in winter, in at least the seventeenth century.

During the investigation into Sheffield area records several county and other archives were contacted, to see if there is other local documentation.<sup>45</sup> It appears that there is not. Durham, Northumberland, Lancashire, Calderdale, Huddersfield, Shropshire, Rutland, and Gwynedd in north Wales, apparently have no such records known. Reference to Cheshire documents of Macclesfield Forest has been made above. In addition, librarians of the Edinburgh Botanical Gardens and University of Wales Bangor College knew of no sources. The only material known to the Museum of English Rural Life at Reading was Radley's paper, which is also the only reference in a recent glossary of agrarian terms.<sup>46</sup> No further library or archive information has been forthcoming.

The known records cover a wide period. Documents of the late twelfth to the mid-eighteenth centuries contain references to rents, fines and agreements concerning the species. In the Sheffield archives records of the first half of the seventeenth century are especially well represented. The latest hollin

rental traced there is from 1737, although hollins were being 'stubbed' some decades before then. Pennant's reference to the use of holly in the Lake District is almost forty years later, and is the latest reference so far collected. The search has produced other late dates of 1556 for Bowland (with an indication of disusage), the 1570s for the Yorkshire Dales, and 1632 for Derbyshire for its use as a stock fodder. Its use for deer is continuing sporadically. Otherwise, it seems to be used — as are other plants — only as a last resort in emergencies, and its traditional use is almost forgotten. A request for information placed in leading British farming and countryside magazines and in several north Midlands newspapers in 1976 produced several interesting replies; but, although several referred to gorse and a few to ivy, none provided further evidence of the remembrance of this use of holly.

Too few dates are available here for an analysis of the decline of the practice. Two correlated conclusions, however, seem evident. First, the earliest date is southern; which may simply reflect the availability of early records. Second, not only are the latest references northern, but so are the majority of the records. The practice *seems* to have persisted longest in the northern uplands. The (apparent) absence of early printed references would support the conclusion that the use of holly as a fodder in southern England declined early, or has not been important there.

Whether or not this suggested trend correlates with agricultural changes is not clear. Improvements in swards, especially by the liming of base-poor soils, may account for the reduced significance of holly after the early seventeenth century. Many lowland areas were regularly limed from the later part of the sixteenth century onwards. As marling became counter-productive, lime was applied in some of the marginal grazing areas of the north-west Midlands and mid-Wales after the beginning of the seventeenth century.<sup>47</sup> A

<sup>43</sup>In *The Mabinogion*, tr G Jones and T Jones, 1949.

<sup>44</sup>H A Hyde, *Welsh Timber Trees*, Caerdydd, 1961.

<sup>45</sup>By D J Smith.

<sup>46</sup>I H Adams, *Agrarian Landscape Terms: a glossary for historical geography*, Inst Br Geog Special pub no 9, 1976.

<sup>47</sup>E Kerridge *The Agricultural Revolution*, 1967.

Royal Society survey in 1664 found liming well used in both uplands and lowlands of North and East Yorkshire in about the period when southern Yorkshire hollins were being abandoned.<sup>48</sup>

This decline in the importance of holly in the midlands and north almost certainly predates the period when the use of turnips became significant here. Although widely grown in the south-east by the last third of the seventeenth century, they appear not to have become popular in parts of the midlands and north until well into the eighteenth century.<sup>49</sup> Turnip cultivation appears to be recorded only rarely in the decades at the turn of the seventeenth-eighteenth centuries: the first Yorkshire evidence is from 1691, and that for Northumberland is from the 1720s.<sup>50</sup>

The evidence so far gathered suggests that the southern Pennines were a rather exceptional area, with their many late references. It does perhaps indicate, however, that the practice of feeding holly (and other woody species) to animals was once widespread and significant. Holly was especially important in the Sheffield area as winter fodder for sheep; although it was also fed to cattle, horses, and perhaps goats, and cut for red deer. In this respect, with the exception of the Lake District, the Sheffield records are unlike the better documented evidence elsewhere in England. Cattle, and in the New Forest ponies, are much more commonly mentioned than sheep. But the greatest number of references seem to be to deer. If an assessment of the significance of holly were to be made on the available information, it would be that its greatest importance was for park and 'forest' deer; that as a supplementary or emergency feed for domestic stock it was occasionally valuable; and that its use as a *regular* fodder for sheep was unusual. We

must note, besides this, that the majority of instances evidenced are from north of the Midlands.

In this respect, the Lancashire references, from an area historically important for cattle-raising, are interesting. Whereas the numerous, but individually probably fairly small, hags in the southern Pennines were sufficient reserves for supplying the local sheep flocks, in cattle areas a similar provisioning was probably not possible. In much of the north of England holly is rather slow-growing and subject to cutting back by frost. A large acreage would be necessary to provide a herd with more than a supplement to their diet or an emergency supply of forage.

One correspondent, a north Lancashire cattle farmer, regards holly as uneconomic as cattle fodder because of this: it (with other browse) would probably be important only after poor summers or in long periods of snow. Of course, a dense evergreen bush that can be eaten into provides excellent shelter. It is suggested that the stocking rate in that area was low enough to allow a surplus of *in situ* grass for most winters. Although they are derived from woodland animals, it has been estimated that in a totally forested area two square kilometres of browsing might support only 20 to 30 head of cattle.<sup>51</sup> It is interesting in this context to note a January 1648 agreement in the Sheffield area, that a tenant have the use of a 'craggy corner where the Hollen grows', for pasturing '4 Beastes or 40 Sheep to Lady Day [March 25th] . . .'.<sup>52</sup> Sheep, of course, are not part of a woodland fauna.

The recognition of holly as browse and loppings for deer is curiously patchy, in that, although the practice has obviously been important and widespread and is still used regularly in some parts of the country, many authorities do not mention its value. It has been suggested that the practice was so usual that reference to it was thought unnecessary,

<sup>48</sup>J Thirsk and J P Cooper, *Seventeenth Century Economic Documents*, Oxford, 1972.

<sup>49</sup>Kerridge, *op cit*.

<sup>50</sup>Information provided by R Morgan, University of Reading (*The Root Crop in English Agriculture, 1650-1870*, unpublished PhD thesis, 1978).

<sup>51</sup>J G Evans, *The Environment of Early Man in Britain*, 1975.

<sup>52</sup>Sheffield City Libraries, Ronskley Collection 156, no 4320.

although specific mention of other woody species and general references to browsewood are common.<sup>53</sup> Shirley, Whitaker, and Whitehead make no specific mention of holly, for example.<sup>54</sup> The many other incidental references make this documentation ambiguous.

In some areas, holly was encouraged especially for deer. At Cranborne, on the Wiltshire-Dorset border, 'ridings through the whole of the Chase [were] planted on both sides with various evergreens as browse for support of the deer in winter'.<sup>55</sup> According to modern observations<sup>56</sup> holly, together with many other woody plants, often features in the winter diets of roe and fallow deer (the latter were probably introduced to Britain by the Normans); and, with introduced conifers, can be an important winter food of red deer, the stags of which sometimes break off branches of browse with their antlers. Its importance may be greatest for the red deer. One study of roe deer suggests a preference for brambles and conifers; but that 'if the winter is severe, bramble becomes scarce and ivy and holly are sought'.<sup>57</sup>

### III

To what extent was holly an important fodder? In the Sheffield area, it was important enough to establish at least two terms in the local vocabulary. Hunter notes that 'a *hag* of *hollin* was the holly trees growing upon a certain portion of ground in the commons of the manor of Sheffield. The lord was accustomed to let or sell them by the hag',<sup>58</sup>

and the term *hag(g)*, meaning an enclosure, a boundary hedge, or a portion of woodland, especially one marked for felling,<sup>59</sup> was often used locally to refer to 'hollin hags'. There is still a rash of *hag* names in the north Derbyshire Hope Woodlands. The word *hollins* seems itself to have been used as a collective term for such a cluster of hollies. With echoes of Hunter, the *English Dialect Dictionary* defines *hollin rent* as 'payment for holly trees growing in a certain part of the common of the manor of Sheffield'.<sup>60</sup>

*Hol(l)in* or *hol(l)ing(e)* occurs extensively in England and in English. *Hag* and its many variants such as *hay* and *hague*, is rather more widespread, and has a multitude of nuances. Both are frequent in toponyms, especially field-names and minor place-names. ME *hol(l)in* is itself a modification of OE *holegn*. Both *hol(l)in* and *holi* forms occur from before 1200, with the former perhaps the more widespread and more frequent. Although *hollin(g)* forms persist in some northern and scottice dialects, *holly* became predominant after about the early sixteenth century. Variants *hollen*, (*hullen*), and *holm(e)*<sup>61</sup> also remain: New Forest holly clumps, for instance, are commonly called 'holly holms' or 'holms' (as well as 'hats').<sup>62</sup> OE *holegn* is cognate with Welsh *celyn* (and the Cumbrian and Cornish) and Gaelic *coll(in)*, which also feature frequently as toponyms. (*Coll* meaning hazel is likewise represented.)

Several medieval Latin terms seem to translate as 'holly': *hus*, *huis*, *hussus*, and *husseiam* are scattered in documents. Medieval Latin also seems to have *hol(l)ina* for 'hole-/holimede' (although this English term is apparently localized), and *huissartum* for 'an area cleared of holly'.<sup>63</sup>

<sup>53</sup>I am grateful to F J Taylor Page of the British Deer Society for his comments and the references to deer management.

<sup>54</sup>E P Shirley, *Some Account of the English Deer Parks with Notes on the Management of Deer*, 1867; J Whitaker, *Descriptive List of the Deer Parks and Paddocks of England*, 1892; G K Whitehead, *Deer and their Management in Deer Parks of Great Britain and Ireland*, 1950.

<sup>55</sup>W Chafin, *Anecdotes respecting Cranbourne Chase*, 1818.

<sup>56</sup>Eg G B Corbet and H N Southern (eds), *Handbook of British Mammals*, Oxford, 2nd edn, 1977.

<sup>57</sup>R Prior and A McDiarmid, *The Roe Deer of Cranbourne Chase: an ecological survey*, 1968.

<sup>58</sup>J Hunter, *Hallamshire Glossary*, 1829.

<sup>59</sup>The etymology of *hag(g)* is confounded by the assimilation of a second meaning of 'to cut back, to hack'. See eg *New English Dictionary*; *Scottish National Dictionary*; S M Kuhn and J Reidy, *Middle English Dictionary*, Ann Arbor, 1963.

<sup>60</sup>J Wright (ed), 1898-1905.

<sup>61</sup>Another meaning of *holm*, a river islet or flat ground by a river, is more prevalent. *Holm* occasionally means Elm in some northern districts.

<sup>62</sup>Tubbs, op cit.

<sup>63</sup>See eg Addy, 1858, loc cit.

Spray and Smith show that south Yorkshire and north Derbyshire are littered with place-names commemorative of holly and hags. A casual examination of detailed maps of several other parts of England suggest that — although they are especially frequent in the southern Pennines — this is not exceptional. In order to see the likely extent to which holly has been sufficiently notable to be used in place-names, a systematic search of the Ordnance Survey one-inch sheets for England was made.<sup>64</sup> These were independently scanned twice for all names containing the elements *holly/ies*, *holling(g)/s*, and close variants. *Holm(e)* was not included because of its confusing homophone. This perhaps leaves parts of southern England under-represented. Similarly, because of their mixed etymologies, *hag* names were not surveyed. Besides this, there are, of course, at least two major disadvantages in such a method. At this small scale, maps include relatively few names: field names, for instance, are not recorded. Compound names, moreover, with *hollin* or *holly* as a second or subsequent element, are likely to be missed, however attuned the eye may be. It is very likely that, despite the cross-checking, a number of names were overlooked. This, however, is true of all the sheets examined, so the omissions will probably be fairly evenly scattered. One likely advantage of this method is that the maps probably contain relatively few very modern place-names and thus represent the pattern derived from early namings. The results of this search are shown in Fig 1.

The map shows two rather different distributions. That of the *holly* names is widespread. The names are never very dense, although there is a clustering between the southernmost foothills of the Pennine chain and the Welsh Marches. The pattern of *hollin(g)* names is different in three respects:

<sup>64</sup>England is covered by 100 sheets of the 7th series. The Scottish border region seems to have very few holly names. *The Ordnance Gazetteer of Scotland* (ed F H Groome, 1894–95) includes no *hollin* place-names, and only one or two of *holly*.

the names are not so widely scattered; they tend to be concentrated in the northern uplands (although relatively scarce *holling* has a southern bias); and they are virtually absent from the eastern lowlands. In view of the evidence for the importance of holly in the New Forest, it is interesting that Fig 1 shows few place-names from that area. A search of larger-scale maps revealed little further commemoration. An examination of the biology of holly, below, will consider the scarceness in the east, where the plant was perhaps noted for its novelty.

It is not pretended that Fig 1 is a very accurate record of the distribution of holly place-names. It is, however, probably acceptable as a general picture. Nor is it pretended that there is any rigid distinction between *hollin(g)* and *holly* names. Dialect differences have not been investigated; and many of the names must have simply been 'updated' — for instance an Essex *Holly Wood* was first recorded in 1342 as *Hullenwode*, and Sheffield's *Hollin Lane* officially became *Holly Lane* in 1830. Moreover, there are some names which are not commemorative of the plant: Warwickshire *Holly Stiches* and Nottinghamshire *Holly Gate* were *hollow syches* (a stream) and *hollow gate* (road). The English Place-Name Society's county volumes were examined and as many such spurious names eliminated as possible; but doubtless some remain in Fig 1. These inaccuracies notwithstanding, the main holly place-names in England are concentrated in the north and North Midlands, away from the lowlands and more fertile soils; and a majority of them are probably older than the names given after *holly* became widespread as the received name for the species.

If the evidence of place-names is not altogether trustworthy, the pattern presented in Fig 2 is highly dubious. It does make, however, an interesting comparison with Fig 1. The map shows the frequency of *Holly* and *Hollin(g)* surnames in several parts of the country. The data were gathered by counting personal entries in 29 of the 1972



FIGURE 1

*Distribution of Hollin, Holling and Holly place-names on one inch to one mile Ordnance Survey maps of England*  
The map shows Hollin (stars), Holling (barred stars) and Holly (disc) names, together with the 400 ft contour and areas of calcareous rocks (stippled).

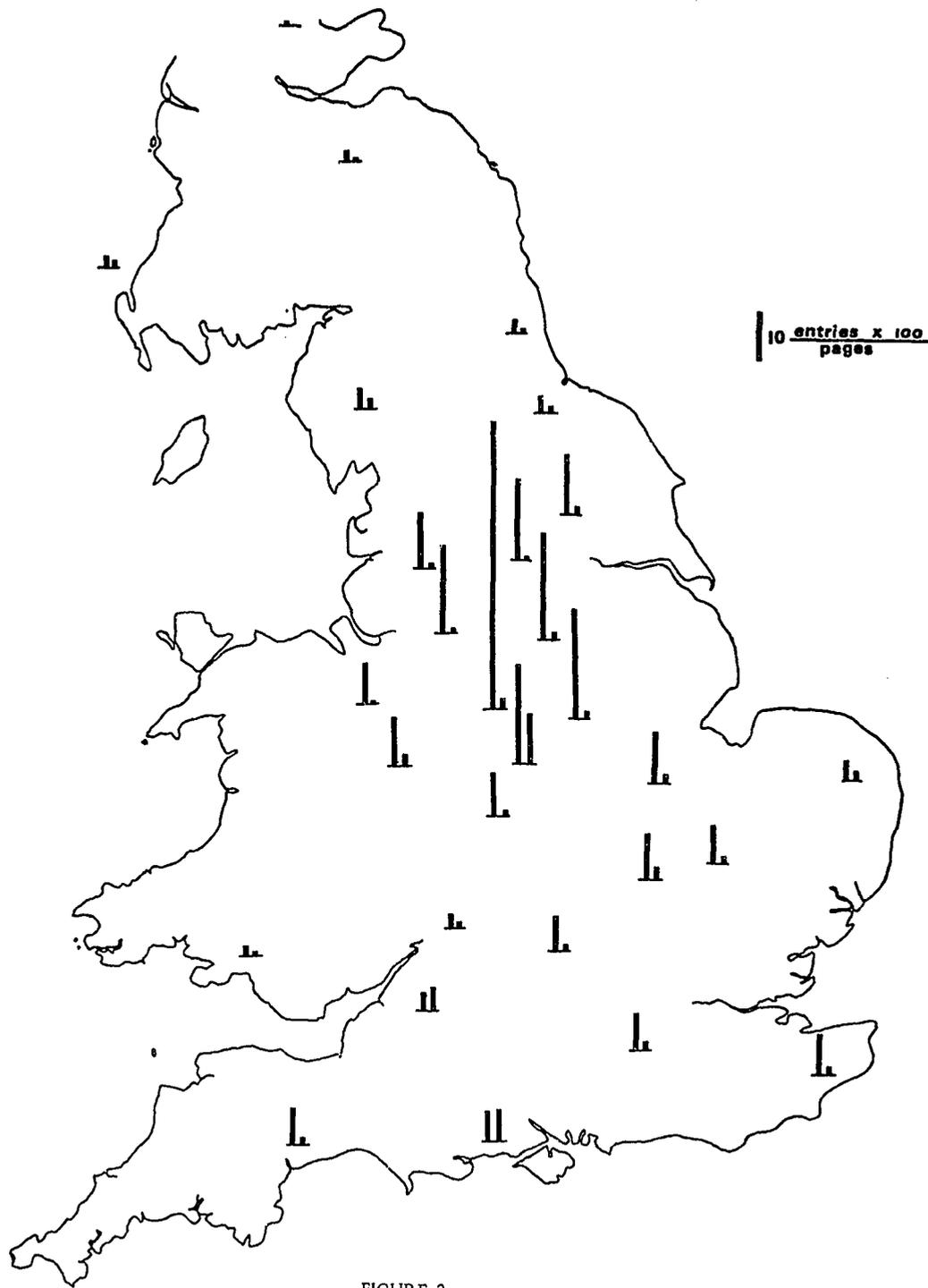


FIGURE 2  
*Holly surnames*

Left-hand bars show Hollin and Holling names, right-hand bars show Holly names, represented in 29 telephone directory areas. The histograms originate approximately in the centres of the directory areas. The length of bar shows  $\frac{\text{number of entries} \times 100}{\text{number of pages}}$ . The scale indicates 10 units.

issues of the Post Office telephone directories. The method is crude; but it is occasionally used as it allows standardized samples to be gathered. Only names in which *holly/holling* was the sole or first element were investigated: a number of infrequent possible variants were excluded because of uncertain origins. It is immediately obvious that in the north Midlands, Yorkshire and Lancashire, there is a marked abundance of *Hollin(g)* surnames. The *Holly* names, presumably generally the more recent, are nowhere especially common. Both forms seem to be very infrequent in Cumbria and the north-east. Indeed, the general pattern is not dissimilar from that in Fig 1 with a slight southern shift.

#### IV

There is good evidence that holly was once much more abundant in Britain and perhaps throughout Europe. Pollen analyses show that in the Boreal period (c7600–5500 BC) there were large amounts of the species in Britain and Ireland.<sup>65</sup> Historically it seems to have had a greater abundance than at present.<sup>66</sup> However, it is probably not native over the whole of Britain. The distribution map in the *Atlas of the British Flora* shows that in much of the eastern lowlands of England it is probably an introduction.<sup>67</sup> In the Northumbrian and Scottish uplands, as well as along parts of the east coast, it is fairly scarce. It is perhaps commoner in the more

oceanic west of Britain; although it also occurs commonly in the drier south-east. It grows on a variety of substrates, from peat and acid soils to chalk. Conditions above 1000 ft are inhospitable for holly. Although it grows in west Scotland up to about 1700 ft (520 m), and in the southern Pennines to 1650 ft (520 m), we know from Scandinavian studies,<sup>68</sup> and from British work,<sup>69</sup> that holly is limited in the north and east of Britain, as well as at the higher altitudes, by low temperatures: it does not fruit well and often suffers frost damage, and it grows slowly in these adverse conditions.

Holly rarely forms woodland in Britain. There are, however, some small stands whose origin and successional status are not clear.<sup>70</sup> Some of these we can now see clearly as derelict hags. Probably, also, the clustering of holly as an understorey in some of the northern and western oak-birch woodland, and in many areas of scrubland, represents old hags that have been overtaken by derelict coppice or incoming tree species. The Sheffield area furnishes many such instances. Other likely examples are scattered further north in the Pennines, parts of Scotland, Cumbria and mid-Wales, and doubtless elsewhere. Holly is fairly long-lived; and evidence that many of these have been managed stands is shown in the form of the plants themselves. Here, they are characteristically bushes rather than trees. Some, for example those of Stiperstones, are old pollards. Many northern examples have been coppiced — and, judging by their rather amorphous forms, frequently.

If the name distribution in Fig 1 is examined ecologically (and disregarding the Celtic areas<sup>71</sup>), it is clear that holly has been

<sup>65</sup>Godwin, *op cit.*

<sup>66</sup>H M Fitzpatrick ('Trees of Ireland — native and introduced', *Sci Proc Roy Dublin Soc*, XX, 1933, pp 597–656) suggests this for Ireland.

<sup>67</sup>F H Perring and S M Walters, 1962. The species' caption contains an error, and should distinguish between 'recorded and probable introductions' and 'all other records'. The incomplete map of the distribution and frequency of the species in *hedges* by G F Peterken (*Watsonia*, X, 1975, pp 297–9; and an earlier version in E Pollard *et al*, *Hedges*, 1974) shows a scarceness in a belt running SW from Humberside and the fens through the Midlands; and greatest abundance S and SW of this belt, in Norfolk, SE Wales around the Black Mountains, the Welsh Marches, parts of N and NE Yorkshire.

<sup>68</sup>J Iversen '*Viscum, Hedera and Ilex* as climatic indicators', *Geol För Stockh Förh*, LXVI, 1944, pp 463–83.

<sup>69</sup>Peterken and Lloyd, *loc cit.*

<sup>70</sup>A G Tansley, *op cit.*

<sup>71</sup>W H Pearsall ('Place-names as clues in the pursuit of ecological history', *Namn och Bygd*, XLIX, 1961, pp 72–89), examining the first three of the English Place-Name Society's volumes on Cumbria, found very few holly/hollin toponyms — and made no interpretations from them.

commemorated largely in northern and western districts, generally on non-calcareous substrates (even in the north), and almost entirely at altitudes greater than 400 ft (120 m). Most of these areas correspond with acidic, shallow and rather infertile soils, which have for many centuries carried vegetation types which offer very little bite — and where winter fodder would normally be scarce. They are concentrated in areas historically important for both sheep and cattle. The emptiness of the eastern lowlands corresponds well with the suspect distribution shown in the *Atlas of the British Flora*. The majority of low altitude names are of holly forms.

#### V

When the name distribution demonstrated for the Sheffield area is examined more closely and with reference to the ecology of holly, several relationships with local topography and geology are apparent.<sup>72</sup> The names are mostly concentrated on the Millstone Grits and Coal Measure sandstones and shales. There is a particular concentration on the valley slopes of the Don and its tributaries, and of the Derwent and Ashop. No names were found in a search of 6 in maps (this does not mean that they do not occur . . .) on the Carboniferous Limestone; and there are few on the Magnesian Limestone and Bunter deposits. In the calcareous areas, and especially on the Magnesian Limestone, winter grass forage is much more abundant than on the acidic substrates.

There seem to be three correlations with topographic features. Almost all the mapped sites lie above the 400 ft (120 m) contour. Few lie above 1400 ft (430 m). Land below 400 ft is largely to the east of the survey area. In the Pennine foothills it is associated with valley bottoms which have been used for grassland and some arable farming. More holly toponyms seem to be associated with

moderate slopes than with steep or level ground. The steeper slopes would be rather inhospitable to holly on some of the substrates because of their unstable soils; and a high proportion of the steeper ground is, of course, at higher altitudes. Gentler slopes are associated with the valley bottoms and the eastern lowlands. It is interesting to note, bearing in mind holly's sensitivity to frost, that the microclimate of a valley side is often warmer in cold periods than the top or bottom of the slope.<sup>73</sup> In north Derbyshire, in the Ashop, Hope and Edale Valleys, valley bottom temperatures are often 5–8°C lower than at points only a little way up the slopes.<sup>74</sup> In this area there is a slight tendency for farmsteads to be situated at mid-slope positions.<sup>75</sup> That frost pockets and exposed areas of hillsides should be avoided is well known to holly growers in North America — where berries and leaves are gathered for decoration.<sup>76</sup> Iversen has demonstrated that holly at the foot or head of a slope is more likely to be damaged by frost than at a 'safe' mid-slope point.<sup>77</sup>

Finally, holly names seem to be associated with the warmer aspects (the direction in which the ground faces). Aspect data for holly toponyms in the Sheffield region and in mid- and north-east Yorkshire were gathered. Both indicate a slight preponderance of names on south-west-facing slopes. This same bias, for both place-names and holly-rich woods, has been suspected also in the Forest of Bowland.<sup>78</sup> Such aspects, of course, are favoured throughout Britain; and it is not surprising to learn that in the same Derbyshire valleys noted above settlements — especially the oldest farms — are situated conspicuously at mid-slope southerly or

<sup>72</sup>Spray and Smith, loc cit.

<sup>73</sup>R Geiger, *The Climate near the Ground*, 3rd edn, tr M N Stewart, Cambridge, USA, 1950.

<sup>74</sup>A Garnett in D L Linton (ed), *Sheffield and its Region*, Sheffield, 1956.

<sup>75</sup>K C Edwards, *The Peak District*, 1962.

<sup>76</sup>J F Thompson 'Holly orchards could yield red gold', *The Grower*, 8 June, 1963, pp 1158–9.

<sup>77</sup>Loc cit.

<sup>78</sup>Arthur Lord, pers comm.

south-westerly positions.<sup>79</sup> Although a systematic examination of holly growing in this same area has not been carried out, observation tends to confirm the names distribution pattern in the Ewden and Derwent-Ashop Valleys. However, modern developments, especially afforestation, make investigation difficult.

It is not pretended that all the names plotted in Fig 1 represent locations where there was a significant fodder plant. A correlation, however, is assumed. In the southern Pennine survey nearly all the *hollin* and many of the *hagg* names (gathered from 6 in OS maps, and various plans of larger scales) are demonstrable or likely candidates. Here holly is commemorated in just those locations where its nurturing would be especially valuable to stock. It seems likely that, bearing in mind the geographical distribution of the earlier names evident in Fig 1 this correlation is probably widespread in the *hollin(g)* toponym distribution.

<sup>79</sup>Edwards, op cit.

A past value as fodder, of course, is not the only reason why *hollin(g)* and *holly* names are frequent in some areas. The plant often provides distinctive landmarks; and it yields traditional Yuletide symbols (now Christianized decorations). Many farmers still regard holly highly as *shelter*, both for cattle and for sheep — better shelter than other bushes and trees because it is dense, evergreen, and nutritious.

This significance of holly has been commented upon by a number of correspondents, whereas the memory of its fodder value is (except for deer) virtually non-existent.<sup>80</sup> Indeed, although farmers in south Wales, the Midlands and the north of England drew attention to the historical importance of gorse as winter provender, only one appreciated holly, and that only from occasional observations of a browsing 'boredom habit' of individual cows. Southern Pennine farmers, indeed, seem to have forgotten their ancestors' husbandry completely.

<sup>80</sup>See M Hartley and J Ingilby *Life in the Moorlands of North-East Yorkshire*, 1972, for an exception.

## NOTES AND COMMENTS

(continued from page 96)

The Treasurer reported another satisfactory year, and thanked Miss Beazley and Mr Casey for their work. The dual effect of economies in printing the *Review* and increased revenues from sales, conferences, and from monies on deposit had been to enable the Society to extend its publication activity. An enlarged edition of the *Review* would soon be forthcoming, and the Society could afford to explore the possibility of publishing supplements or making further joint publications. Copies of Dr Raine Morgan's bibliography, *Dissertations on British Agrarian History*, just published jointly with the University of Reading, were available at the conference.

The Editor reported on the continuing backlog of long articles awaiting publication, and a satisfactory flow of submissions during the year. Of more concern was the long delay in the publication of the *Review* through problems at the press which he hoped would not recur.

The meeting expressed its thanks to the Warden and staff of the college and to the Secretary for the conference arrangements.

### WINTER CONFERENCE 1981

The Winter Conference will be held on Saturday 5 December 1981 at the Polytechnic of Central London, New Cavendish Street, on the theme 'Government Policy and Agriculture'. A booking form with full details of the programme is inserted into this issue of the *Review*. Any enquiries should be addressed to Dr Dennis Baker, Christ Church College, Canterbury, Kent.

### SPRING CONFERENCE 1982

The Spring Conference in 1982 will be held at St Andrews as previously announced but at a slightly later date. The conference will be held at Hamilton Hall, the University of St Andrews, 5-7 April 1982. The programme with booking forms will appear in the next issue of the *Review* but the Secretary would welcome suggestions on the programme.