

Plan of an Agricultural Society and Experimental Farm in Northumberland

By H. CECIL PAWSON

THE title is taken from a printed document in the writer's possession which covers eight large pages and is dated 1797. The document was prepared to provide "Hints for the consideration of the Committee appointed to prepare and digest" the plan as indicated. It would seem that after full consideration the time was not considered ripe for the project, for it was not until 1836 that the Northumberland Agricultural Society—which still continues—was formed, and Cockle Park, the world-famed experimental station, was not established until 1896. The seed for both these developments was surely contained in this earlier proposal.

In 1793, four years earlier than the document under consideration, J. Bailey and G. Culley in their *General View of the Agriculture of the County of Northumberland with observations on the means of its improvement* stated that "There never was an Agricultural Society in this county." They concluded this well-known survey by a reference to "Public Farms," which, they urged, would if conducted by proper persons in every county "tend more towards the perfection of Agriculture in all its branches, than any other measure that has ever been suggested." It seems a fair deduction, therefore, to attribute the plan for Northumberland in some if not large measure to George Culley himself who farmed extensively at that time in the north of Northumberland.

The plan is divided into two parts. "1st. The Nature and Constitution of Agricultural Societies; and 2ndly, the Nature and Constitution of the proposed Agricultural Society, and the Plan for conducting the Experimental Farm." In the second part the leading objects of investigation were defined as follows:

What is the best mode of cultivating Arable Land?

What is the best system for the management of Grass Land?

What are the most useful Implements of Husbandry?

What are the most profitable Breeds of Animals?

What is the best plan for rendering waste or barren Land productive?

These and other matters of prime agricultural importance were elaborated in the plan. It was proposed to secure a farm of from 220 to 440 acres of arable land and from 50 to 300 acres of waste land "according to the amount of subscriptions on which to try the various necessary experiments." It was also proposed to raise the sum of from "2000 £ to 3500 £" by forming a Joint Stock Company through such shares as may be agreed upon. "His Grace the Duke of Northumberland whose zeal in the cause and great property in the county entitle him to every mark of respect to be President of the Society." A Committee of management was to be formed and "As the whole success of the plan must depend on the choice of Manager, too much attention cannot be paid to this important particular." The farm was to be leased for at least a term of fourteen years. Then follows a complete list of the proposed equipment, i.e. live and dead stock.

It is interesting to note that five different breeds of cattle were to be tried: the Short-horned, the Long-horned, the Devonshire, the Galloway, the Kyloe or Highland Scots. The sheep included 10 Dishley ewes at £5 each, 10 South Down ewes at £2 each, 10 Cheviot ewes at £1 10s. each, 10 Heath ewes at £1 10s. each; so it is evident Bakewell's Dishley sheep still held the field. Cleveland, Clydesdale, and Suffolk horses are listed to be purchased at £54 a pair. Pigs were to consist of two of each of the following breeds:

"The large white kind, Berkshire, Chinese, and South Sea."

The cropping was also fully set out. It included turnips and ruta бага (the original name for the swede, hence the term, still applied in Scotland, "bagies"). "Seeds" are listed, including white clover, which would be the cultivated form, with chicory, rib-grass, burnet, rye-grass, red clover, etc.

The various experiments to be tried under the heading of "The Waste Land Department" were listed in the following terms:

1. Liming the Surface.
2. Ploughing merely, and sowing with grass-seeds.
3. Ploughing and Liming.
4. Paring, Burning, and Liming.
5. Paring, Burning, Ploughing, and Liming.
6. Paring, Burning, Ploughing, Liming Dugging or Marling.
7. Experiments with Turnips, Kale, Oats, Rye, etc.

One of the most interesting portions of the document, headed "Conclusion", is given here, excluding the final seven resolutions for implementing the Plan.

CONCLUSION

"Before concluding this Report, the Committee beg leave to submit the following observations respecting the expediency of resolving to carry the preceeding Plan into immediate execution, if, after being thoroughly weighed, improved upon, and corrected, it should be fortunate enough to meet the approbation of the County of Northumberland.

"There are many advantages in its favour at present, which cannot always be depended upon. Not only several of the greatest proprietors in the county, but also many of the most intelligent Farmers in it, whose assistance is so particularly material, have come forward with a degree of liberality and spirit which does them infinite credit. If once, however, that zeal is suffered to fall off, it is impossible to say whether it can again be revived to equal advantage.

"2d. The burdens to which landed proprietors are now subject, render it indispensibly necessary that they should promote the improvement of their property as much as possible, by bringing the knowledge of Agriculture to perfection; much improvement may be effected in a short space of time, in consequence of which both the Farmer and the Landlord, in proportion to their respective interests, must be benefited.

"3d. Nothing but Agricultural Improvements can enable Great Britain to surmount its present difficulties. The effects of the scarcity it lately experienced, it has hardly yet recovered; and were another to take place soon, to the same extent, (which without Agricultural Improvements may be safe) it is impossible to answer for the consequences. Whereas, did we make the most of our soil, we might enrich ourselves by exporting the surplus of our Agricultural productions, the most beneficial source that it is possible for a nation of commercial opulence to possess. On the whole, the Committee beg leave to submit the following Resolutions to the consideration of the Landed Interest of the County."

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

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