

Enclosure Commissioners and Buckinghamshire Parliamentary Enclosure¹

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I
BETWEEN 1738 and 1865 there were over 130 enclosure Acts in Buckinghamshire affecting the whole or parts of more than 130 parishes out of the approximately 220 in the county at the time. Over 166,000 acres, or 35 per cent of the county, was enclosed in a little over 120 years. In comparative terms such a density places the county ninth overall in ranking order of counties, the preceding eight being in the south and east midlands, with the exception of the East Riding of Yorkshire.² More important, however, is that parliamentary enclosure in Buckinghamshire was concentrated in the five northern hundreds, part of the Midland Plain, affecting 58 per cent of Cottesloe hundred, 48 per cent of Aylesbury hundred, 44 per cent of Newport Pagnell hundred, 41 per cent of Buckingham hundred, and 27 per cent of Ashendon hundred, compared with only 7 per cent and 9 per cent respectively for the Chiltern hundreds of Burnham and Desborough.³ The combined density of enclosure for the five northern hundreds was 44 per cent, placing them among the top six counties, a group which is centred upon Northamptonshire and Bedfordshire, and includes Rutland, Huntingdon, Oxfordshire, and North Buckinghamshire.⁴

¹ My thanks are due to Mr E. J. Davis and his staff at the County Record Office, Aylesbury, for assistance in the completion of this research, and to Dr B. A. Holderness and Professor F. C. Spooner for helpful criticism of an earlier version of this article.

² From G. Slater, *The English Peasantry and the Enclosure of Common Fields*, 1907, pp. 140-2. See the revised figures in M. E. Turner, 'Parliamentary Enclosure and Population Change in England 1750-1830', *Explorations in Econ. Hist.*, XIII, 1976.

³ The last hundred in the county, Stoke, is situated in the Thames valley where 30 per cent of the land was enclosed by Act. This was mainly common and waste, enclosures symptomatic of the reclamation of marginal lands during the French Wars of 1793-1815.

⁴ The highest density of enclosure was in Northamptonshire, where over 50 per cent of the county was enclosed between 1727 and 1815.

Research has been published on such architects of the landscape as the surveyor and the landscape gardeners; why not also on the architects of the Georgian enclosures?⁵ After all: "Behind the features of the landscape . . . there are men, and it is men that history seeks to grasp." They include enclosure commissioners, surveyors, clerks and solicitors, bankers, an assortment of labourers, and, of course, the landowners and their tenants, but as determinants of landscape change the concentration must be on the commissioners and their surveyors. As architects of the cultural landscape they have left their indelible mark for all to witness.⁶

II

For the earlier period of enclosure, essentially before the mid-1770's, an enclosure commission might consist of five or more commissioners. Thereafter it was usual for only three to be appointed, and a more formal procedure was adopted at the same time. The enclosure Act usually stated that each commissioner was the specific representative of a particular landowning interest: one for the lord of the manor, one for the tithe owner, and one for the majority (by value) of the remaining landowners. This last was reckoned not as the numerical majority but rather in terms of the extent of land possessed. Thus, if one landowner possessed 51 per cent of the parish he would automatically be the "majority of landowners." Recourse was usu-

⁵ The full quotation can be found in M. Bloch, *The Historian's Craft*, English translation, Manchester, 1954, p. 26.

⁶ For example, E. G. R. Taylor, 'The Surveyor', *Econ. Hist. Rev.* 1st ser., XVII, 1947, pp. 121-33, and some of her other works, for which see *Trans. Inst. Br. Geog.*, XLV, 1968, pp. 181-6; H. C. Prince, *Parks in England*, Isle of Wight, 1967; B. E. Coates, 'The work of Richard Woods, landscape gardener, in the West Riding of Yorkshire', *Trans. Hunter Arch. Soc.*, VIII, 1963, pp. 297-306.

ally made to the annual land tax assessments in order to establish this fact. The whole procedure no doubt prompted the contemporary observation that the nomination of commissioners was: "a little system of patronage . . . the lord of the soil, the rector, and a few of the principal proprietors monopolise and distribute the appointments."⁷

As many as 143 different people were appointed as enclosure commissioners in Buckinghamshire, including those who acted as valuers for the Inclosure Commission set up by the General Act of Inclosure of 1845. Of these commissioners 83 served only once, 28 on two occasions, and the remainder as follows:

1 served 29 times	1 served 9 times
1 served 15 times	2 served 7 times
1 served 14 times	2 served 6 times
1 served 13 times	2 served 5 times
1 served 12 times	8 served 4 times
1 served 11 times	8 served 3 times
3 served 10 times	

They came from many walks of life. Of the ten members of the clergy to act, eight were active before 1780. The rest of the body of commissioners were often a mixed assortment. Edward Elliot, who acted once at Shipton in 1744-5, was a schoolmaster, and was joined on this enclosure by three "yeomen" and one "gentleman." Thomas Taylor from Swanbourne, a commissioner ten times in the county, lived and died as a carpenter.⁸ It was also usual for a commission to consist of local dignitaries and those with a direct association with the soil, such as graziers, husbandmen, and yeoman farmers. They conducted the allotting of the parish, and the latter group were also employed as surveyors, not as quantity surveyors (that is land surveyors), but as quality surveyors, assessing the rental value of the land, a job for which they had vast practical knowledge. One objection to eighteenth-century enclosures is that many proprietors came to have greatly diminished allot-

ments compared with their scattered property in the former open fields. They may not have received a proportionate quantity of land, but as compensation they almost certainly received a greater quality of land. This point was invariably omitted by the critics of enclosure, though the commissioners' oath did require them to have due regard to quantity *and* quality. Some of these commissioners were themselves in receipt of quite large properties. For example, Thomas Green of Whitchurch who acted on nine commissions, was in possession of 366 acres at the enclosure of his home parish in 1771-2;⁹ the widow of William Cripps (who acted twice) was allotted 106 acres at the enclosure of Newport Pagnell in 1794-5;¹⁰ Thomas Hooton (who acted once) was allotted 106 acres at the same enclosure;¹¹ Joseph Burnham, who acted three times as a commissioner, and several times as solicitor and/or clerk, was allotted 205 acres at the enclosure of Aylesbury in 1771-2,¹² and James, another active member of the Burnham family, was allotted 261 acres at Grandborough in 1796-7.¹³ Many other commissioners were styled yeoman or gentleman, and by residence or title clearly had very close associations with the soil, and were obviously very well endowed with the necessary credentials to adjudicate on and allocate land.

The practice of separating the quality survey from the quantity survey continued until the early 1790's, by which time a new breed of commissioner had developed, the land valuer-cum-surveyor, with skills both in quality and quantity. Earlier, specially appointed quality men were assisted by one or more of the commissioners. In time the latter undertook more and more of this quality assessment until special quality men were no longer required. Two of the more notable quality assessors were John Watts of Sulgrave in Northamptonshire, and Thomas Harrison of Stony Stratford in Buck-

⁷ J. Billingsley, *General View of the Agriculture of Somerset*, 1797, p. 59.

⁸ His will consisted of his carpentry tools and his stock of timber: Bucks. R.O. (hereafter B.R.O.), Wills D/A/WE/115/18.

⁹ B.R.O. *Inrolments* vol. 1, Whitchurch Enclosure Award.

¹⁰ B.R.O. IR 67(i), Newport Pagnell Enclosure Award.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² B.R.O. *Inrolments* vol. 1, Aylesbury Enclosure Award.

¹³ B.R.O. *Inrolments* vol. iv, Grandborough Enclosure Award.

inghamshire. They were also very active commissioners, the former six times in Buckinghamshire, seven times in Berkshire, and many times in Oxfordshire, the latter 10 times in Buckinghamshire in the very short space of eight years from 1767 to 1775.¹⁴ A number of other commissioners in the early period were also very busy men. Francis Burton of Aynho in Northamptonshire, styled as "Gentleman," acted 15 times in Buckinghamshire from 1762-1777, 28 times in Oxfordshire, once in Wiltshire, five times in Berkshire, once in Hertfordshire, and 14 times in Northamptonshire.¹⁵ In another capacity he was the land steward for the Cartwright family of Aynho,¹⁶ and no doubt had considerable claims to adjudicate on matters concerning the land and commodious methods of land subdivision.

Compared with the commissioners in the later enclosures, the earlier ones were remarkably expeditious in completing their task. Possibly the division of labour between quantity and quality was instrumental in this. The transition in the last quarter of the eighteenth century to a more professional type of commissioner was relatively slow, but that such men as Francis Burton and John Watts served so many times in the earlier period indicates the establishment of certain commissioners having professional reputations. Some of them were in office for many years, notably Thomas Green of Whitchurch, who served on the eighth Buckinghamshire enclosure at Winslow in 1766-7, and died in attendance in 1795 while serving on the forty-seventh, having served nine times altogether. Locally he was a much-sought-after

man, attending at Cublington in 1769-70, Hardwick in 1778-9, and Aston Abbots in 1795, all parishes contiguous to his home parish of Whitchurch. His other appointments were all in parishes within eight miles of Whitchurch. During his lifetime there were only six enclosures within that eight miles which escaped his attention. No doubt he was well acquainted with many of the local large landowners, so possibly his popularity was born out of patronage by his friends. John Lord was another commissioner who served locally, attending 10 enclosures within 10 miles of his home parish of Drayton Parslow; and Thomas Harrison from Stony Stratford, in serving 10 times in the county, only once worked more than 10 miles from home. In fact, of the 143 commissioners to work in the county, 30 acted in parishes adjacent to their home parish, and 14 acted in close proximity to home, within a distance of five miles. These people therefore possessed a close association with the land that was to be subdivided and a familiarity with the allottees, which was no doubt some influence on their original appointment.

The early origins of professionalism can be seen in the activities of Francis Burton. He served on at least 64 enclosures before he died in 1777, when still actively engaged on several commissions. No other commissioner has emerged from the printed sources for this earlier period who was as active as Burton, though perhaps this is not surprising in view of the findings of the Select Committee of 1800, which saw the adoption as commissioners of men "of peculiar qualifications as well as a reputation for experience and integrity," and so "confined the choice of them within no very large limits."¹⁷

By the mid-1790's commissions were increasingly dominated by land agents and surveyors, though this trend clearly had roots in the previous three decades. Some of the notable commissioners of the 1790's and 1800's had served a kind of apprenticeship earlier as quality men or surveyors. Robert Weston of Brackley in Northamptonshire served five times in Buck-

¹⁴ Berkshire information from Berkshire R.O., *Inclosure Catalogue*. For Oxfordshire see *A Handlist of Inclosure Acts and Awards relating to the county of Oxford*, Oxford C.C., Records Publications No. 2, 1963, *passim*; Harrison was later a witness to the House of Commons Select Committee of 1800 on Enclosure: *Reports*, IX, 1795-1800, pp. 231-2.

¹⁵ Refs. as in n. 14; see also R. E. Sandell, *Abstracts of Wiltshire Inclosure Awards and Agreements*, Wilts. Rec. Soc., xxv, Devizes, 1971, p. 96; for information on Hertfordshire and Northamptonshire I am obliged to Mr P. Walne, County Archivist, and Mr J. W. Anscomb of Daventry respectively.

¹⁶ I am obliged to Mr P. King, County Archivist, for this information.

¹⁷ *Reports*, *op. cit.*, p. 230.

inghamshire as a commissioner from 1776 to 1782, but he had earlier gained experience as a surveyor on *at least* 11 other enclosures.¹⁸ John Fellows of Foscott near Buckingham, who was the busiest commissioner in the county, was engaged 29 times between 1788 and 1825, but he had served a lengthy apprenticeship as a surveyor on 11 other enclosures between 1773 and 1781. Another active commissioner, William Collisson of Brackley in Northamptonshire, also served for a long time as a surveyor. Joseph Burnham, an Aylesbury solicitor, acted three times as a commissioner in the 1790's but had earlier gained experience as both solicitor and clerk to several commissions. Thomas Harrison stated that he had worked on more than 20 commissions, "sometimes as Solicitor; as Commissioner frequently, and often as Agent for the parties concerned."¹⁹

Such professionalism is demonstrated in the number of commissions a particular person undertook, and in the place of origin of the commissioners. Of those who were engaged on Buckinghamshire enclosures before 1790, 33 came from Buckinghamshire, 10 from Northamptonshire, 7 from Oxfordshire, 7 from Warwickshire, 3 from Berkshire, 2 from Bedfordshire, and 1 each from Hertfordshire, Lincolnshire, London, Middlesex, and Staffordshire. With the exceptions of those from Lincolnshire and Staffordshire, all of them came from within 30 miles of the Buckinghamshire border, and with the exceptions of Lincolnshire, Staffordshire, and Warwickshire they all came from counties contiguous to Buckinghamshire. Of those who were appointed between 1790 and 1819 the pattern is different and more diffuse: Buckinghamshire 11, Bedfordshire 8, Middlesex 7, Oxfordshire 6, Northamptonshire 4, 3 each from Lincolnshire, London, and Hertfordshire, 2 from Gloucestershire, and 1 each from Derbyshire, Warwickshire, Wiltshire, Cambridgeshire, Hampshire, and Huntingdonshire.

¹⁸ The surveyor is not identifiable in every enclosure award, and for three Buckinghamshire enclosures the awards have not survived.

¹⁹ *Reports, op. cit.*, p. 230.

Earlier enclosures were therefore characterized by the appointment of relatively local men (one-half were from Buckinghamshire itself before 1790), but as a more professional body of men emerged so promoters were prepared, perhaps forced, to search farther afield—only one-fifth came from Buckinghamshire between 1790 and 1819. Recommendation may have been important, or certain commissioners may have worked for the same landowners in a number of different parishes. For example, the only time that John Hudson from Louth in Lincolnshire worked in Buckinghamshire was on the Hanslope enclosure of 1778–80. He represented the Corporation of Lincoln as lay impropiators of the tithe. There is therefore a possible connection in his appointment, and no doubt he represented the Corporation on other enclosures in Lincolnshire.²⁰

In the period between 1790 and 1819, the most active decades in Buckinghamshire enclosure history, a relatively small number of commissioners was employed; certain men appear repeatedly in the awards, and five, John Fellows, William Collisson, John Davis, Richard Davis, and Thomas Hopcraft, appear on 79 commissions, though a number of these occasions overlap. For example, Hopcraft and John Davis worked together four times, and Collisson and Fellows six times. Specific men were singled out, and the professional enclosure commissioner can be recognized.

One accusation that can be levelled against these men is that they undertook too many appointments at any one time. Consequently they were unable to devote sufficient time to each enclosure, and the business of allotting became very piecemeal and protracted. Table 1 shows the extent of absenteeism recorded by some of the commissioners. The long gaps between commissioners' meetings were one very material reason for the abnormal length of time taken to complete an enclosure after 1790, and for the

²⁰ B.R.O., IR/135, Hanslope Enclosure Award. Hudson was a surveyor for at least 25 Lincolnshire enclosures and a commissioner for at least 19: R. C. Russell, *The Enclosures of Market Rasen, 1779–81, and of Wrawby-cum-Brigg, 1800–05*, Workers Ed. Ass., Market Rasen Branch, 1969, p. 34.

TABLE I
ATTENDANCES OF COMMISSIONERS AT ENCLOSURE MEETINGS

<i>Parish and date of enclosure</i>	<i>Number of meetings</i>	<i>Number of days</i>	<i>Attendances of commissioners (in days)</i>
Hanslope (1778-9)	12	62	King 59, Mitchell 40, Hudson 55
Bierton (1779-80)	17	45	Green 31, Taylor 45, Pywell 25
Little Woolstone (1791-2)	9	25	No absenteeism recorded
Drayton Parslow (1797-8)	11	56	Chamberlain 52, Hopcraft 55, Fellows 37
Stoke Mandeville (1797-8)	16	73	Jos. Smith 73, Platt 72, Fellows 67
Weston Turville (1798-1800)	16	59	Bainbridge 36, Rd. Davis 56, Fellows 59
Olney (1803)	4	4	No absenteeism recorded
Moulsoe (1802)	8	32	Jn. Davis 16, Collisson 29, Fellows 32
Kimble (1803-5)	26	152	Rutt 143, Collisson 138, Fellows 147
Langley Marish (1809-13)	18	54	No absenteeism recorded
Bledlow (1809-12)	28	127	Trumper 90, Collisson 126, Rd. Davis 112
Stewkley (1811-14)	49	216	Jn. Davis 26, Bevan 133, Horwood 205, Fellows 206
Amersham (1815-16)	18	50	Wm. Davies 47, Collisson 47
Princes Risborough (1820-3)	35	141	Ch. Smith 131, Collisson 138, Horwood 139
Towersey (1822-4)*	28	77	No absenteeism recorded
Monks Risborough (1830-9)	79	236	Horwood 228, Ch. Smith 107 (out of 122), Dixon 152 (out of 176), Glenister 96 (out of 114), Allen 41 (out of 60)
Whaddon (1830-1)	17	64	Watford 63, John Davis 64
Great Horwood (1841-2)	21	33	Hart 33, John Davis 29
Buckland (1842-4)	29	41	Hart 39, John Davis 39

Sources: B.R.O., Minute Books.

* At the time of enclosure Towersey was in Buckinghamshire but it has since been transferred to Oxfordshire.

contemporary objections about commissioners.

In an attempt to ensure the speedy completion of enclosures special clauses were slowly introduced into acts. Such regulations appeared as early as the 1770's. At North Marston, enclosed in 1778-9, the surveyors took their oath of office on 16 April 1778. The quality men were ordered to value the fields before 1 June following, and the surveyor was ordered to complete his survey by 1 September.²¹ At Hanslope, enclosed in 1778-9, the quality men took their oath on 4 May 1778, and were ordered to complete the valuation of the open fields by 3 July, and of the old enclosures by 6 July.²² Later it became usual practice to define the working day accurately. It consisted of eight hours from 25 March to 29 September, and six

hours for the rest of the year. Any lesser time for which the commissioners were engaged on an enclosure would be automatically charged as half a day. It also became usual practice to penalize the enclosure administrators for delaying the completion of enclosures. At Whaddon, enclosed in 1830-1, the commissioners were paid four guineas a day, but if the enclosure had lasted for more than three years after the Act was passed the rate would have been halved.²³ Only four Buckinghamshire enclosures were contracted for a specific lump-sum fee rather than the usual daily rate, and by comparison with other contemporary enclosures the commissioners were remarkably expeditious in completing the awards.

²¹ B.R.O., IR/129, North Marston Enclosure Award.

²² B.R.O., IR/135, Hanslope Enclosure Award.

²³ B.R.O., IR/M/13, Draft Bill of Whaddon Enclosure, and Whaddon Enclosure Act, 11 Geo. IV, 1830, ch. 10, pp. 10-11.

If objections were made to claims or the siting of allotments and roads, then the commissioners would listen to such objections and adjudicate. Often they would alter earlier decisions in order to accommodate the proprietors. The minute books of commissioners' meetings are testimony of much discussion between the two parties, and if they are a fair testimony then most of the commissioners emerge with unstained characters. Records of enclosure meetings carry with them an overwhelming sense of fair play, and the proprietors took full advantage of the commissioners' powers to authorize exchanges of land, whether in open fields or old enclosures.

The professionalism of the commissioners is demonstrated in their varied abilities, for they had to perform many tasks. They figure prominently in the stage of soliciting the Bill. Those eventually named in the Act were often approached long before its passing, and were employed by the leading promoters to sound out opinion in the parish, and, since many of them were land surveyors and valuers, they might be asked to undertake preliminary surveys. William Collisson prepared a plan of Stoke Mandeville in 1793, four years before the enclosure Act was passed.²⁴ John Fellows prepared a survey of the rector's estate in Radclive in the year of the Tingewick-cum-Radclive Act, 1773, and James Collingridge produced one for the lordship of Tingewick. They were both subsequently appointed as surveyors to the enclosure.²⁵ In accounts the commissioners and surveyors often received substantial incomes for employment rendered before the Acts were passed.²⁶ Apart from administrative duties, they had to display a wide variety of skills and experience in assessing claims and in terms of quality and quantity, and in setting out the roads and allotments. Perhaps more important is that the economy of the village had to be con-

ducted by them; they became in a sense the court baron and select vestry, with responsibilities for administering the field rules of the village, ordering the ploughing of the old fallow, and regulating the intercommonage of the stubble. Their backgrounds as practical farmers, land agents, solicitors, and surveyors gave them due qualifications to act in these varied capacities. At the first two meetings of the Bierton enclosure of 1779-80 the commissioners suspended common rights, ordered all fallow fields to be sown with clover, and ended quit rents upon thirty-five years' purchase. After harvest, rack rents were suspended, and common rights opened again on all the open fields except those sown with clover. The following March, as the enclosure neared completion, they extinguished common rights, and allowed the proprietors to enter their newly staked-out allotments to fence and cultivate them as they wished.²⁷ As soon as possible after harvest the Bledlow commissioners began to direct the course of husbandry, and before the following season they had ordered the ploughing of the fallow.²⁸ The Towersey commissioners, on assuming control in the parish, ordered that the previous year's fallow, beans, vetches, peas, or seeds should be sown with wheat and no other white crop. Where there had been wheat, oats, or barley it was to become beans, peas, or vetches, and the remainder of the open fields were to stay as was the usual custom.²⁹

W. E. Tate has suggested that occasionally commissioners syndicated, offering their services *en bloc* to enclosure promoters. M. W. Beresford has made the same suggestion, and similar findings have been made in Bedfordshire and Yorkshire.³⁰ This was possibly so, although when one considers the number of en-

²⁴ B.R.O., IR/M/11, *A copy of the totals collected from a book of reference to a plan of Stoke Mandeville in the county of Buckinghamshire taken in 1793 by William Collisson of Brackley*.

²⁵ New College, Oxford, L.M. No. 1.

²⁶ See my 'The cost of parliamentary enclosure in Buckinghamshire', *Ag. Hist. Rev.*, xxi, 1973, pp. 35-46.

²⁷ B.R.O., AR/32/60, Bierton Minute Book.

²⁸ B.R.O., IR/M/2/3, Bledlow Minute Book.

²⁹ B.R.O., IR/M/19/1, Towersey Minute Book.

³⁰ W. E. Tate, 'Oxfordshire Enclosure Commissioners, 1737-1856', *Jour. Mod. Hist.*, xxiii, 1951, pp. 142-3; M. W. Beresford, 'The commissioners of enclosure', *Econ. Hist. Rev.*, 1st ser., xvi, 1946, p. 132; P. L. Hull, 'Some Bedfordshire surveyors of the eighteenth century', *Jour. Soc. Archivists*, 1, 1955, p. 33; W. S. Rodgers, 'West Riding commissioners of enclosure, 1729-1850', *Yorks. Arch. Jour.*, xl, 1962, p. 415.

closures a top commissioner undertook it is quite likely that some of them were engaged together on several enclosures quite by chance. Also, it should be remembered that they were nominated in the first place by particular land-owning groups. In the earlier period the busier commissioners gained considerable reputations, though mainly very local ones, and therefore it would have been quite usual for the same ones to be engaged together several times. In the later period there were fewer local commissioners of experience from which to choose, and in a sense "demand was simply greater than supply."³¹ It is understandable, therefore, that the names of William Collisson, John and Richard Davis, John Fellows, and Thomas Hopcraft (of whom only Fellows was a native of Buckinghamshire) should occur in enclosure after enclosure. Of the many examples of close association between commissioners and surveyors, the most outstanding example is the incidence of personalities who came from the small town of Brackley in Northamptonshire. On the first occasion on which William Collisson of Brackley acted as a commissioner in Buckinghamshire, he was assisted by William Russell and John Weston as his surveyors, both of whom also came from Brackley. For his next seven commissions his surveyor was Michael Russell, also of Brackley (son or brother of William Russell?). On subsequent commissions Collisson was accompanied by his own son. Is it coincidence that the Collissons and the Russells both came from Brackley? Collisson was certainly the head of a family firm of land surveyors and agents, and the Russells may have been in his employ. Collisson himself may have inherited or in some other way obtained his business from a certain Robert Weston, also of Brackley, who acted five times as a commissioner and 11 times as a surveyor in Buckinghamshire between 1762 and 1782. Brackley certainly produced a remarkable line of commissioners-cum-surveyors: there were the Westons, the Russells, the Collissons, and another surveyor named James Collingridge who acted five times in the county in the 1760's and 1770's.

³¹ Rodgers, *loc. cit.*, p. 407.

Finally, there was John Mitchell of Brackley who acted once as a surveyor. From 1760 to 1820, out of 88 commissions of enclosure in Buckinghamshire, a Brackley commissioner, surveyor, or both was engaged on *at least* 52 occasions.³² In addition, Brackley personalities had considerable employment in other counties.³³ Efforts to trace those eighteenth-century land agents and surveyors in twentieth-century Brackley have not been successful.

III

To place these figures in more meaningful perspective it is possible to calculate the degree of landscape change attributable to each personality. The most active commissioner in Buckinghamshire was John Fellows of Foscott near Buckingham. He served as a commissioner 29 times between 1788 and 1825, as a surveyor eight times, and as an umpire three times. In one way or another he was partly responsible for fashioning the field and road pattern, and subsequent farm pattern, of about 63,180 acres in the county. This amounts to about 13 per cent of the county area, or about 29 average-size parishes. More important, it amounted to 38 per cent of all the land enclosed by Act of Parliament in Buckinghamshire. In traditional open-field Buckinghamshire north and west of the Chilterns he was partly responsible for about 61,600 acres, or about 18 per cent of the land area. This was 44 per cent of all north Buckinghamshire enclosed by Act of Parliament. They were rightly his fields, his hedgerows, his roads and his bridleways, and in the majority of cases they still survive.³⁴

Fellows and his father, also John Fellows were both petty landowners and tenants in at least four Buckinghamshire parishes, though it is clear that they accumulated land to no great

³² The number may be greater because the surveyor is not identifiable in every enclosure award, and for three Buckinghamshire enclosures the awards have not survived.

³³ For example, see Oxford C.C., *op. cit.*, *passim*, William Collisson, Robert Weston.

³⁴ These and subsequent acreages are taken from M. E. Turner (ed.), W. E. Tate, *A Domesday of English Enclosure Acts and Awards*, Reading Univ. Press, Autumn 1977.

size. The main source of evidence is the land-tax schedules of 1782-1832. The family originally hailed from the hamlet of Westcott, formerly in the parish of Waddesdon. When the hamlet was enclosed in 1765-6, father and son received 21 and 159 acres respectively. The land tax for 1782 shows that the estate was almost equally divided between the two, and that they were the third and fourth largest contributors respectively. The father was an owner-occupier, but the son was an absentee-owner. This state of affairs continued until the father died in 1790. Thus the land tax for Westcott in 1791 shows Fellows in possession of all the land, a situation which continued until 1809, at which time a Joseph Marriot was contributing to the land tax for what was formerly Fellows's land. In addition, from 1782 to 1790 the father was a tenant of Earl Temple in nearby Ashendon, and an absentee-owner in North Marston.

John Fellows himself left the family village to become a tenant of the Marquis of Buckingham at Foscott, near the extensive Stowe estates. In most of the enclosure documents he is styled as a gentleman from Foscott. It seems very likely that he employed an under-tenant, because his enclosure activities from the 1770's onwards would surely have prevented his occupation of the farm. He was a surveyor four times in Bedfordshire between 1775 and 1800, and a commissioner in the same county on 15 enclosures between 1793 and 1817; in Oxfordshire he served once as a surveyor and once as a commissioner; in Northamptonshire he worked on seven commissions between 1797 and 1821, and on one each in Hertfordshire and Somerset.³⁵ The reason for his appearance so far from home in the last example appears to be through the landed interests of the Buckingham family.

It would be useful to discover how John Fellows became proficient as a land surveyor

³⁵ I am indebted for information to Mrs McGregor of the Bedfordshire R.O., and to Mr J. W. Anscomb of Daventry, and Mr P. Walne of the Hertfordshire R.O. for information relating to Northamptonshire and Hertfordshire respectively. For Oxfordshire see Oxford C.C., *op. cit.*; for Somerset see Tate MSS., University of Reading, MS. 1093/6/2/16, correspondence relating to Bucks., letter of 11 May 1964, Henry Huntington Library, California, to W. E. Tate.

since his "yeoman origins" would have indicated a more direct association with the soil. From 1807 onwards the documents describe him as a gentleman from Buckingham, and since this almost coincides with his disappearance from the land tax it may be that he set himself up as a professional land agent-cum-surveyor in that town. That both father and son emerged from the yeomanry and began to ascend the agricultural and social ladder is undeniable.³⁶ In addition to becoming a very active enclosure administrator, Fellows followed his father in acting as a land-tax assessor, first for the hundred of Ashendon, and later for the hundred of Buckingham.

Even more impressive is the activity of John Davis of Bloxham near Banbury in Oxfordshire. He worked in many counties in southern England from the 1790's to the 1820's.³⁷ In Buckinghamshire he was partly responsible for enclosing 19,580 acres during 13 commissions, in Berkshire for 52,900 acres (32 times a commissioner and three times an umpire), in Oxfordshire for 51,600 acres (34 times a commissioner), in Gloucestershire for 22,370 acres (six times a commissioner), in Wiltshire 13,090 acres (four times a commissioner and three times an umpire), in Northamptonshire for 11,480 acres (seven times a commissioner), in Bedfordshire for 8,920 acres (four times a commissioner), in Leicestershire for an estimated 7,345 acres (five times a commissioner), and in Hampshire for 2,380 acres (twice a commissioner).³⁸ This makes a grand total of about 180,750 acres and

³⁶ See B.R.O., Wills D/A/WE/115/11, D/A/WE/101/58, D/A/WE/68/146; if it is at all significant, Fellows's great-grandfather and his grandfather were both styled "yeoman," while his father and Fellows himself both bore the title "gentleman."

³⁷ There were four commissioners bearing this name, they were all related, and all came from Bloxham. The one itemized here is, however, the most important. See my 'John Davis of Bloxham, Enclosure Commissioner', *Cake and Cockhorse, Journal of the Banbury Historical Society*, IV, Spring 1971, pp. 175-7.

³⁸ Sources of information as already noted and, in addition, Hampshire R.O., Appleshaw Award, No. 19, and South Stoneham Award, Q.E.2; H. G. Hunt, *The Parliamentary Enclosure Movement in Leicestershire 1730-1850*, unpubl. Ph.D. thesis, Univ. of London, 1956; I am indebted to Mr Adrian Randall of the University of Birmingham for information on Gloucestershire.

113 commissions of enclosure—an average greater than *all* the land enclosed by Act of Parliament in Buckinghamshire alone, and over a very much shorter period of time. He was most certainly a very important agent of landscape change, and appears to have been the busiest commissioner yet investigated, quite eclipsing the infamous John Burcham of Coningsby in Lincolnshire, who served on at least 70 enclosures.³⁹ From other sources it can be established that Davis never served on enclosures in Middlesex, East and West Yorkshire, Sussex, Cumberland, Nottinghamshire, Staffordshire, and Cambridgeshire.⁴⁰ His known area of work was from Leicestershire in the north to Southampton in the south, from Bedford and Maidenhead in the east to Tewkesbury and within five miles of Bath in the west.

Arthur Young in visiting Bloxham was particularly impressed by two farmers, Messrs Warrenner and Davis. The latter he described as an excellent practical farmer who had a great deal of experience as an enclosure commissioner, "having been employed upon twenty six at the same time." Indeed, in compiling his *General View* of the county Young paid close attention to the opinions given by Davis on the question of enclosure. Davis believed that enclosure had greatly increased arable production, and that rents would improve. He offered one very material way of lessening the expense of enclosure, that was, by not using post and rail fencing to support the young quickset hedges; all that was required was a shepherd

to restrain the sheep. Needless to say, Davis did not use posts and rails on his farm.⁴¹

It should not be surprising that a commissioner like Davis would undertake so many enclosures, even twenty-six at one time. With a fee of up to four guineas a day, plus certain expenses, it could prove a very rewarding profession. On the other hand, it must have been impossible to undertake effectively as many commissions as Davis did. Indeed, the surviving minute books are testimony of considerable absenteeism by commissioners, and the minute books for Stewkley and Moulsoe in Buckinghamshire reveal that Davis was one of the worst offenders of all. At Moulsoe in 1802 he attended only half the recorded meetings, and for the seven years of the Stewkley enclosure of 1811-17 he attended only those meetings which dealt with the draft award: of 49 meetings, lasting 216 days, he attended only 5, that is 26 days, thus prompting the observation by Young: "Mr. Davis's bill on all his enclosures has not amounted to above 100 pounds per enclosure *though not attending as much as some*."⁴²

It may have been that he attended only those meetings which concerned his sponsors. In the case of Stewkley he contented himself with attending those which settled the tithe commutation for the Bishop of Oxford; on most other occasions he was the representative of the "majority of landowners," and perhaps paid greater attention to the meetings. Nevertheless, his activities in southern England in times of relatively crude communications were extremely arduous and remarkably widespread (see Table 1 above, ref. Moulsoe and Stewkley).

Enclosure produced a number of outstanding individuals and a number of professions which are taken for granted today. It was particularly instrumental in furthering the surveying and land agents' professions. One might answer in the negative the statement by the poet William Cowper who said in 1783 that "God made the

³⁹ R. C. Russell, *The Enclosures of Searby, 1763-5, Nettleton, 1791-5, Caistor, 1796-8 and Caistor Moor, 1811-14*, Nettleton Workers Ed. Ass., 1968, p. 9.

⁴⁰ From the index of enclosure records in Middlesex R.O.; Vanessa Neave, *Handlist of East Riding Enclosure Awards*, Beverley, 1971; W. S. Rodgers, 'The Distribution of Enclosure in the West Riding', unpubl. M.Comm. thesis, Univ. of Leeds, 1953; Catalogue of enclosure maps and awards, supplied by East Sussex and West Sussex R.O.s; *Cumberland Enclosure Awards*, Joint Archives Committee for the counties of Cumberland and Westmorland and the City of Carlisle, 1968; W. E. Tate, *Parliamentary land enclosures in the county of Nottingham*, Thoroton Society Record Series, v, Nottingham, 1935; University of Reading, Tate MSS., Catalogues of enclosure awards in the Staffordshire and Cambridgeshire R.O.s MS. 1093/10/2/10, MS. 1093/10/1/50.

⁴¹ A. Young, *General View of the Agriculture of Oxfordshire*, 1813, pp. 93-5.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 93; B.R.O., Moulsoe enclosure commissioners minute book, Carrington MSS., Box 8a Moulsoe settled estates bundle 11, Stewkley enclosure commissioners minute book, IR/M/10/2.

country, man made the town."⁴³ It may be unwise to tear lines rudely from their text, but as an observation this is very disappointing. In 1783 Cowper was living in the north Bucking-

⁴³ From *Poems by William Cowper Esquire*, 1814, II, p. 40, 'The Task'. My interest in those lines and the poet were first aroused by Professor H. C. Darby; see his 'On the relation of geography and history', *Trans. Inst. Br. Geog.*, XIX, 1953, p. 6, "The landscape of Olney, like the English countryside in general, is as artificial as any urban scene."

hamshire village of Olney, where fifteen years earlier he had witnessed the transformation of the landscape by commissioners. He must have seen the former open fields transformed into numerous hedgerows, and he must have travelled frequently along the newly formed roads. The self-same change occurred in many other parishes in the locality: if it was not already, then it was rapidly becoming a man-made landscape.

Notes and Comments

ANNUAL CONFERENCE AND AGM, 1977

The 25th Jubilee conference of the Society was held at St Anne's College Oxford on 4-6 April 1977. The conference papers were by Professor Axel Steensberg, 'Contemporary agriculture in New Guinea compared with the European neolithic'; Mr Frank Emery, 'The history of the Oxfordshire landscape'; Mr Hugh Prince, 'An agricultural geography of the mid-nineteenth century from the tithe surveys'; Professor Glanville Jones, 'The heritage of early territorial organization in England and Wales'; and Professor F. M. L. Thompson, 'What did English farmers have to grumble about in the first half of the nineteenth century?' The President, Mr John Higgs, proposed a toast to the Society at the opening dinner, and also showed a film, *Man in the Mezzogiorno*, of which he had spoken the commentary. Mr Emery led an excursion to Oxfordshire villages, and the President kindly invited the party to tea at Litchfield Farm, Enstone. There was a record attendance of seventy-five at the Jubilee conference.

The Society's 25th AGM was held on 5 April 1977. Miss Edith Whetham was elected President, and Mr C. A. Jewell and Mr M. A. Havinden were re-elected Treasurer and Secretary respectively. The three vacancies on the Executive Committee were filled by the re-election of Dr D. A. Baker, Dr J. A. Chartres, and Mr A. D. M. Phillips.

In her Chairman's report Dr Thirsk announced that membership had risen from 792 to 818 despite the regrettable necessity to raise the subscription from £3.50 to £5.00 on 1 February 1977. It was hoped that a German foundation would assist with the publication of the English edition of Professor Abel's book on agrarian crises and fluctuations in Europe, and that a successful outcome to this long-standing project would be found. The 1978 Spring Conference is to be held at Swansea on 3-5 April 1978. Finally, she thanked the retiring President,

Mr John Higgs, for his sterling work for the Society over many years.

The Treasurer reported that the Society's finances were healthy at present with a reserve of £5,688 in hand, but that printing costs were continuing to rise. They had reached £4,213 in 1977, and constantly threatened to exceed the Society's income.

The Editor reported that he had received eighteen articles of which he had accepted seven and was still considering another three. There had been an encouraging rise in quality. The meeting thanked the retiring Chairman of the Executive Committee for her devoted work and passed a vote of thanks to Mr Peter Large for organizing the conference so capably.

SILVER JUBILEE PRIZE ESSAY

Sixteen entries were received for the Prize Essay Competition. A special committee read the entries and awarded the prize to the essay by Mr David Cannadine, entitled 'The Landowner as Millionaire: the Finances of the Dukes of Devonshire, c. 1800-1926', which is published in this issue.

WINTER CONFERENCE 1977

The Winter Conference will be held on Saturday, 3 December 1977, jointly with the Historical Geography section of the Institute of British Geographers. It will be held at the Polytechnic of Central London, 38 Marylebone Rd, London, NW1, and the theme will be 'The agricultural consequences of population change'. All enquiries should be addressed to Dr Dennis Baker, The Polytechnic of Central London, 309 Regent Street, London, W1R 8AL.

WORK IN PROGRESS

Dr David Hey has kindly agreed to compile a new list

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