

William Paddison: Marsh Farmer and Survivor of the Agricultural Depression, 1873-96

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Abstract

William Paddison was born in Lincolnshire in 1839 and farmed in the marsh area throughout the agricultural depression at the end of the nineteenth century. He rose from small beginnings to a holding of 100 acres and rode out the depression to emerge in a prosperous state. This paper evaluates the reasons for his success in difficult times and comments on the peasant as a survivor and on Paddison's handling of labour. Primary sources used are Paddison's own diaries and business papers. Paddison seemed to be the right man in the right place at the right time doing the right things but, at the time, he did not know this and his success was not evident until the depression was over. Thirsk has regretted that the annals of such men as Paddison are generally unrecorded: this paper starts to redress the lack of extant evidence of the business methods of medium-sized farmers.

THE Duke of Richmond's Commission of 1879-82 spoke of 'severe and acute distress' to farmers during the agricultural depression.¹ Thirsk wrote much later that there were two classes of peasant proprietors during the depression: 'those whose land was heavily mortgaged, and those who had had a longer start, who had paid for ... their land, and whose interest payments were low. The fortunes of each group were entirely dissimilar'.² William Paddison (1839-1916), marsh farmer, was a peasant proprietor who belonged to the latter category. This paper will attempt to show how Paddison survived the depression through a variety of strategies, both personal and agricultural.

Paddison was a man who rose from unremarkable beginnings to become a prosperous farmer through an unpropitious era. He remained a peasant throughout his life in the sense that he never aspired to the trappings or way of life of a gentleman farmer, yet he was progressive in that he diversified when the old way of farming

was no longer profitable and, atypically of a small farmer of his day, he kept accounts. Detailed information about this class of farmer at this time is rare so this paper gives a valuable and unusual insight into the fortunes of such a man.

There are many remarkable aspects of Paddison but the areas to be explored here are his survival, not only intact but prospering, through the agricultural depression at the end of the last century and the attitude to farm labourers of a man who was the grandson of a poor labourer and son of a very small farmer. How was it that he prospered through these difficult years for agriculture? Evidence will be offered from his diaries and from his farm accounts and notes as far as they are available and relevant.³

In order to define and measure Paddison's progress the following pattern has been chosen. Firstly, the geographical situation of Saltfleetby in the marsh is given. Secondly, Paddison's origins are set out, followed by a section examining the peasant as a survivor. Fourthly, Paddison's progress from poor man's son to capitalist

¹ The author wishes to thank Dr Dennis Mills, the staff of the Lincolnshire Archives Office and of the Lincolnshire Life Museum. Lord Ernle, *English Farming Past and Present*, 6th ed, 1961, p 380.

² J Thirsk, *English Peasant Farming*, 1957, p 312.

³ Lincolnshire Archives Office (LAO), Miscellaneous deposit 731.

is recorded. The next section gives a profile of Paddison's farming and business methods and accounts. The penultimate section explores Paddison's pattern of hiring labour and his attitudes to his employees and, finally, the reasons for his survival of the depression are evaluated.

I

William Paddison was born in Lissinglea in the Lincolnshire clay vale in 1839 but moved with his parents to the marshland village of Saltfleetby in 1844 where his father bought a holding of 21 acres with a house in this area of traditional small farms. For the last two centuries, the marsh area had been noted for its rich salt-grazing lands. Saltfleetby, at the time of the Tithe Commission's map of 1839, had 23 per cent of its cultivated land in arable and 76½ per cent in meadow and pasture – the reverse of the situation at Barton-on-Humber in the north of the county, for example. This balance was still maintained a decade later when Thirsk noted that a quarter of the land between Humberstone and Saltfleet was in tillage compared with almost none fifty years previously. Even so she stated that management of this marshland was bad, 'a deplorable waste of resources', mainly because of land wasted in fallow and poor rotation of crops.⁴ J A Clarke stated that marsh arable farming was 'decidedly inferior to that of the wold land' and 'the large class of small [marsh] freeholders was not among the most experimental'.⁵ Men such as Paddison contradicted this statement and brought notable improvements to marsh farming, managing on small resources to drain land and enhance the feeding of stock.

The year 1892 seems to have been a low point in the depression for Paddison but it is difficult to tell as most of his writing on

farming is pessimistic. The following 1892 letter (no month given – perhaps September) to the *Daily Chronicle* is worthy of Job.

Here we are in the marshes of Lincolnshire with our houses not far above the water after 48 hours of pouring rain during the latter end of last week. Hundreds of acres of corn are out in the field and some uncut. Our stacks are drenched with rain and will not be in condition to thresh for many weeks to come. The price of wheat has just tutch a lower point than it has done before for a period of one hundred years. The value of stock is at present below any level that it has reached during the last 26 years and scores of acres of rich marshland around where I am writing will pay during the season little more than is wasted for rates and tithes. During summer labour has been very expensive and every strong and active man has been able to carry away from his work the value of one sack of wheat weekly from the farm ... no ordinary farmer can exist no not even if he lived on air.⁶

But Paddison did not live on air. Even at this point he had £70 in the bank. If 1892 saw a dip in his fortune, by 1893 he had £340 in the bank.

Saltfleetby is a large triple parish on the east coast of Lincolnshire, just inland from Saltfleet Haven. The nearest market town is Louth, some 10 miles inland. The soil is loam with a clay subsoil and for centuries it has been noted for its rich salt-grazing lands. Paddison noted in his *History of Sollaby* (1907) that, when he was a boy, old people could remember the time when there were not more than two or three ploughed fields in Saltfleetby.⁷ By the end of the nineteenth century there was more arable land in the parish, but the pasture was (and is) still valuable.

Saltfleetby in the nineteenth century was an open village of many small owners (201 owners on the dike reeve's record of 1825). It was full of striving tenants and owners: fewer than 3 per cent owned over 100 acres and the majority owned less than 40 acres. At this date over half the land in the triple parish of 4620 acres (St Peters 2254

⁴ Thirsk, *English Peasant Farming*, pp 238, 243.

⁵ J A Clarke, 'Farming of Lincolnshire', *JRASE*, 12, 1851, pp 342–6.

⁶ LAO, Paddison deposit 6/2/44.

⁷ LAO, Miscellaneous deposit 731/2.

acres; St Clements 1155 acres; All Saints 1211 acres) was owned by 'outners' – people who lived outside the parish but owned a few acres within the boundaries. The land was good and, although it was poorly managed, it patently supported many families on a small acreage. Many of these would also labour for others or follow other occupations – the sea, for instance, offered some spoils and all the usual trades of a large parish were to be found. The inhabitants were apparently ambitious and the proportion of owners living within the parish steadily increased. In 1846, when the Paddisons arrived in the village, land had already been rising in value for some years. In 1856, during the Crimean War, prices of wheat rose to £4–5 a quarter, and the price of land was further enhanced. From this time, land value rose until 1875 when it reached its peak of £100 an acre. Paddison wrote in his *History of Sollaby* that when, 'both land and food was excessively high and an agricultural labourer's wage was extremely low, even under these conditions, working men contrived to save enough money to buy a bit of land and sometimes build a house ... It was true that during the agricultural depression many of the mortgages claimed both land and houses, but this was no degradation to the men who by dint of labour and rigid economy acquired them at first'.⁸ It was not possible for all hard-working owners to survive but Paddison was in a strong position by 1875. He had bought some of the land he farmed and had benefited by his father's and grandfather's financial carefulness; he was inspired by the work ethos around him, and he was intelligent and willing to be flexible and learn by his mistakes.

II

The Paddison family survived through parsimony, bordering on poverty. Paddison told the familiar stories of the era of his father being given bacon to eat and mother and children being pleased with a morsel. His mother gathered acorns to make tea in hard times and told the infant Billy of even harsher conditions in her own childhood. The habits of this sort of upbringing are notoriously difficult to break; Mrs Paddison senior's clothes revealed after her death that she had secreted crusts in her skirts as an insurance against possible hunger, and Billy himself was never tempted to be wasteful. His grandfather had saved a little from his labourer's wage of 11s per week (house and garden were tied but free), so William Paddison senior had a small inheritance. Nevertheless he, Billy's father, went into farm service for twenty-one years to increase his resources; then he married and took the tenancy of the small farm where Billy and his sister were born.

Paddison was reared in the Methodist tradition: his father was a Primitive Methodist but he attended a Wesleyan Sunday school and was a Wesleyan class member. He married at the age of forty and was childless. He worked 'all tides' in the Protestant tradition, and by 'working and scratting' he was able to rent some land in his own name and also to buy some. By 1871 Paddison father and son are recorded in the census as farming 80 acres and employing two labourers and a boy. There is no record of their holding in either 1881 or 1891. In 1892 he wrote in his diary 'The agricultural depression is so great that I cannot make farming pay. Labour seems more scarce and dear every year ... on a farm of 100 acres grass and 56 acres plough labour costs are £250 a year and I live in continual dread that I shall come to want'.⁹ In 1908 he retired

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*

from farming, having survived the depression in a reasonably prosperous state.

III

In Saltfleetby terms Paddison rose to be a substantial capitalist. His origins have been described, but to what social class could he be ascribed? As an old man he wrote that he had always felt himself to be a gentleman inside. He certainly had no social aspirations although he did regret his lack of formal education. When he was a young man he had been ambitious in the sense that he had wanted to better his financial situation. 'When I was young I longed to be into business and possess sheep and beast and land but now I begin to long for rest'.¹⁰ He lived in the days before co-operative farming ventures. He wanted success and respect in his own right and for his own virtues, including the virtue of hard work. Although he became a larger than average farmer with 150 acres at the time of his retirement, he undoubtedly rose to that position from a very small base. Because of his changing and improving fortunes it is difficult to categorize him and, indeed, no category seems totally apposite. He was a capitalist trader/cultivator who benefited from the increasing prosperity of late Victorian society by trading in, or producing, goods outside the normal agricultural sphere.

It might be relevant here to compare Paddison with another Lincolnshire farmer of his day. Cornelius Stovin was a large tenant farmer at Binbrook some 18 miles from Saltfleetby. Stovin was also a Methodist but was of a higher social standing than Paddison. He was a tenant/capitalist farmer of 600 acres of Lincolnshire wold land, some 10 acres of which were plantations used by the landlord as a preserve for game. He retired from the tenancy of

Binbrook Hall in 1892 and moved to a smaller farm at Hogsthorpe on the marsh near Paddison. From there he moved to other financially unviable, rented farms and eventually retired in some poverty in 1918. Compared with Paddison's survival of the bad years and modest prosperity, Stovin's is an unfortunate economic tale.¹¹

IV

As a young man Paddison saved £10 from what was doubtless a pittance allowed by his father and was able to buy a field on mortgage – 16½ acres for £1260. The mortgage was in three parts: £1000 from R. P. Chapman, the vendor; £200 'in another place'; and £50 on note from the vendor. Census returns for 1861 and 1871 record the following acreage for Paddison, Saltfleetby, but there is no indication of how much was owned and how much rented. In 1861 Paddison senior was given as a farmer of 21 acres (corresponding with the amount of land he bought in 1846); in 1871 the figure was 80 acres. The 1881 and 1891 censuses do not give an acreage. The *Return of Owners of Land, 1873* does not name either William Paddison senior or junior, but the Samuel Paddison listed in Saltfleetby St Peters as owning 27 acres 2 roods 35 perches is likely to be William Paddison senior whose Christian name had been misrecorded.¹² It was about this date, five years before his father's death, that Paddison junior had started to purchase land himself on mortgage. It is probable that Paddison senior also rented land, and Paddison junior was certainly renting land from a Mrs Grant from 1867. He was discharged from this tenancy in 1895 to his great indignation. Some of the land he had underlet to a Mr Lusby who appeared to take over the tenancy on Paddison's

¹⁰ LAO, Paddison deposit 2/2/187.

¹¹ J Stovin, ed, *Journals of a Methodist Farmer*, 1982.

¹² BPP, 1874, LXXII, *Return of Owners Land in England and Wales*, 1873.

dismissal.¹³ The next indicator of the acreage owned/farmed by Paddison junior is in his notes when he jotted down the amount he paid for poor rate, highway rate, and dike reeve's rate.¹⁴ Again, this is partial information but it does suggest that he owned about 76 acres at this time. Of this, 46 acres were described as closes, with a meadow of 5 acres 22 perches and a cabbage garden of just under an acre; the acreage of the Minster Field (Paddison's first youthful purchase) is given as 16 acres 2 roods. Mrs Grant's land would bring the total to about 120 acres at this date. From this total, the jottings indicate that Paddison rented out allotments to others.

The Valuation Books arising from the Finance (1909-10) Act reveal that two years after retirement from farming, Paddison owned or rented just over 40 acres in two of the Saltfleetby parishes, St Peters and All Saints.¹⁵ This holding included 27 acres which he still rented from Sturdy's Trust, 1 acres 2 roods rented from the School Managers, and 7 acres 2 roods rented from Lister's executives. He let out small parcels of land to the tenant of a cottage he owned (1 acre 2 roods) and to Joe Hird his former foreman (3 acres). The pattern of tenure and ownership therefore appears rather untidy and complicated, but it does indicate the flexibility of the system in Saltfleetby and the possibilities it offered to an ambitious man not only to add to his holding in various ways but also to let out small parcels to other, poorer men, who might in consequence be beholden in some measure to him and able to offer labour.

V

Paddison kept account books and inventories, in which he stated his case lucidly when he felt himself to be wronged. A

TABLE I
Paddison's income and outlay for 1881

Items	£	s	d
Cereal and stock	438	19	6½
Servants' wages	25	10	0
Day labourers' wages	139	12	3
Rent	407	0	0
Tithe	58	4	0
Rates	120	0	0
Total outlay	1189	5	9½
Total income	3073	6	10
Profit 1881	1884	1	0½

Source: LAD, Paddison deposit 2/4.

review of the papers left behind him gives an insight into his business practices. His failure to recognize that his foreman, Joe Hird, was cheating him is the only evidence of a blind spot in his monetary dealings. Habits of recording were probably handed down by his father. A small notebook amongst other papers headed 'Farming account 1846-60' was very likely compiled by Paddison senior.¹⁶ The book contains notes of payments for food, land tax, tithes, rent, cow-cake and lime. At the other end of the book are receipts for beasts sold, threshing, mowing, thatching. By keeping accounts, Paddison was in the minority of farmers of his day and herein could lie one of the major factors relating to his success. Paddison was an entrepreneur in the sense that he was a farmer/merchant and was willing to take a risk in new ventures. Yet he remained a peasant in the sense that he did not spend money on any status symbol during the depression. He records in his diary that his wife wanted him to buy a pony and trap, but he had seen another family fall into this pretentious, wasteful pattern and come to be bankrupt. He would have none of it.

Paddison's accounts for 1881 show a sizeable profit of £1884 1s ½d (Table I). No profit is given for any other year but there is no reason to suppose that

¹³ LAO, Paddison deposit 6/1/142.

¹⁴ LAO, Paddison deposit 1/1, rough ledger 1888-97.

¹⁵ LAO, 6/Tax/42/53, Saltfleetby valuation book.

¹⁶ LAO, Paddison deposit 2/1, farming accounts.

TABLE 2
Cereal prices per quarter in Lincolnshire and the United Kingdom

Year	Wheat						Barley						Oats					
	UK		Lincs		Louth		UK		Lincs		Louth		UK		Lincs		Louth	
	s	d	s	d	s	d	s	d	s	d	s	d	s	d	s	d	s	d
1886	31	0	30	3	29	7	26	7	24	2	23	4	19	0	18	6	17	4
1890	31	11	31	5	31	1	28	8	28	11	27	5	18	7	18	0	17	2
1895	23	1	22	9	22	9	21	11	21	6	20	10	14	6	13	10	13	3

Sources: BPP, 1888, X, *Select Committee on Corn Averages*; 1896, XCII, *Agricultural Returns for 1895*; LAO, Paddison deposit, 2/15.

Paddison's financial state was unhealthy at any time judging by his inventories and other jottings. An inventory of assets for 1890 shows a valuation of £2271; that for 1891 £2300 12s; that for 1892 reveals a slight dip to £2081; in 1893 the amount improved to £2328 6s. Although the precise date of the inventories is not given, it is probable that Paddison undertook them at the same time each year. In 1881 all types of sheep were listed as 'sheep'; in 1890 they were divided into ewes, lambs and tups; but in 1891 and 1892 they were again 'sheep'. Taking the 1890 lambs as a guide, the inventories were probably taken at the beginning of the year, a view supported by the fact that in that year three mares were in foal.

Comparison of Paddison's figures with prices is difficult as his inventories were sparse and not dated by month, and prices fluctuated greatly within one year. However, taking national figures, Lincolnshire prices, prices in Louth market and figures from Paddison's inventories the following information is offered (Table 2). In the three years identified Lincolnshire prices were slightly below the national average, and Louth prices were below the Lincolnshire average. Paddison's inventory of 1890 gives his own valuations as: wheat 35s per quarter, barley 30s per quarter and oats 17s per quarter. Therefore, wheat and barley are both shown as being valued higher than the national average market price, and oats are slightly below.

It is hard to draw any useful conclusion from this as a valuation is not a market price, and there is no way of knowing in which month Paddison made his valuation, but one can at least see a relationship between the national figures and Paddison's own.

The successful farmer during the depression was the one who managed to increase input – in other words, one who kept the land in good condition and had a high output, cultivating the land to full capacity. Paddison seems to have fulfilled this description. There is no mention of fallow in any of his papers but he obviously used fertilisers and attended to drainage. He was keenly aware of good husbandry.

Beans and peas had been grown in Lincolnshire throughout the nineteenth century as part of the customary rotation in which they provided nitrogen for the wheat crop; but after 1890 they were produced for human consumption. There is some evidence that Paddison was willing to sell in small quantities in, what would nowadays be termed, 'farm gate sales'. The market for bulbs also developed during the nineteenth century, and the snowdrop trade in particular seems to have been established in Lincolnshire in the last two decades of the century.¹⁷ One of the essentials of bulb culture is that they should be preceded by a crop that is heavily manured

¹⁷ A. Ashby, 'Bulb growing in south Lincolnshire', *JRASE*, 76, 1915, p 110.

TABLE 3
Cropping in Saltfleetby, 1867-1900

Crop	Acreage in		
	1867	1891	1900
Wheat	395	401	260
Barley	248	383	259
Oats	275	200	205
Beans	157	89	170
Peas	70	111	8
Potatoes	39	55	32
Turnips, swedes, mangolds	184	170	115
Cabbage	0	2	1
Fallow	17	4	9
Rotation grass	102	481	415
Permanent grass	2652	2075	2255
Parish total	4620	4620	4620

Sources: PRO, MAF68, Parish agricultural statistics.

and leaves the ground in good tilth. Paddison would understand this. Bulbs were not recorded in the Agricultural Returns so it is impossible to ascertain if Paddison was alone in Saltfleetby in growing this crop. It was certainly not a crop suitable for a small man renting a few acres, as tenant right agreements usually did not allow for the growth of bulb crops, and Paddison probably grew them on his freehold land.

An examination of cropping in Saltfleetby before, during and after the depression does not suggest drastic changes in the methods of farming (Table 3). However, it does suggest efficient use of all the available land and, in Paddison's case, he seized the opportunity of using small freehold patches imaginatively. Marsh farmers were likely to have a wide knowledge of the management of grassland, relying largely on permanent pasture rather than leys. Orwin and Whetham suggest that, in midland and eastern counties, keeping the ley down for a year or two longer involved a marked fall in output over the rotation and gave low yields from grassland, whether taken as hay or grazing.¹⁸

Temporary leys under normal management were apt to give progressively less grazing after the first year. There is no evidence that Paddison fell into this trap. Although his outgoings were consistently high in the years for which data exist, his income was yet higher. Such a return would suggest that he maintained his efficiency, that his land management, including grassland, was effective.

At all times Paddison seems to have exploited quick-turnover crops such as potatoes, beans and fruit. Although his books all show that big profits were made in the last six months of the year, there was a flow of cash throughout the year. An undated entry in a small pocket book records the money in his purse at Louth Fair in a year which must have been about 1890: gold £54; silver £1 7s 6d. At the same time he records money at home as: gold £38; silver £1 5s; Smith's rent £4 15s; tithe £9 9s; Ted's tithe £1 8s 9d, surprising amounts to have had on his person.¹⁹

Because of the non-degradable quality of wool, it could be stored until the moment for sale was right. In his capacity as a dealer, Paddison had ready cash available to buy at the right price, although he did not always buy and sell to advantage. In June 1895 an unhappy Paddison recorded in his diary that he had had 'a very harrising day'. He sold 400 tod of wool to a Mr Pinning. A week later wool prices rose and he would have made £100 more if he had waited. At this date he had £400 in the bank, though he confided to his diary that he wished it were £1000.

The diverse nature of Paddison's enterprises is evidenced by entries in his account book. In 1882 he paid 12s to an unspecified person or persons for leading granite for two days.²⁰ The parish was paid £1 4s by him for 'kidding 400 kidds'. Did he thus profit in a small way from parish

¹⁸ C S Orwin and E H Whetham, *History of British Agriculture 1846-1914*, 1964, pp 246-7.

¹⁹ LAO, Paddison deposit 2/5, inventory.

²⁰ LAO, Paddison deposit 2/5.

pauper labour or was he attempting to keep the poor rate down? In 1883 Paddison was involved in sales of seed barley and also cartloads of nitrate of soda the price of which, for 2½ cwts, was £1 14s.²¹ There is no account of a shepherd's wage in extant records but in 1892 there is evidence that Paddison kept sheep at Grainthorpe together with a Mr Marwood.²² His account of turnip keeping is '86 sheep from 9 February 1892 £12 16s 4d'. So this was land used on a contract scheme but not rented.

There is little evidence of Paddison's buyers, apart from local transactions, but in 1893 there is a reference to 'black sheep sent to London £3 7s 11d' next to 'sheep killed to sell at home'.²³ The railway came to Saltfleetby in 1877. Paddison was quick to see the advantage of this to a trader and when the opportunity arose he bought land next to the station; in 1880, when he married, he was able to rent a substantial farmhouse nearby. His yard adjoining the station yard put him in a prime position to receive consignments of coal from the Yorkshire coalfields. The population of the three Saltfleetbys peaked at 629 in 1881 by which time the coal-burning range had become universal. On his farm Paddison bred horses which he sold at Saltfleet Horse Fair so providing haulage animals for the distribution of his coal. Similarly Joe Hird, his farm man, was given full employment by using his labour both on the farm and in the coal business. In the period 1888-97, during the last years of the depression, his ledger includes sales of coal, corn, peas, sheep, hares, potatoes and cattle.²⁴ He also traded in cabbages, cauliflowers, pig feed, ham, bacon, peas, flowers, plants, bulbs, vegetables and sold manure, straw and seed corn and turnip seed.

All this was sound practice. Wilson Fox,

assistant commissioner to the Royal Commission on agricultural depression in Lincolnshire, observed in his 1895 report that farmers growing seeds, bulbs and vegetables were surviving the depression better than those concentrating on corn.²⁵ Bulb growing was an innovation and a profitable one too. Paddison sometimes had a happy knack, or courage, to try new crops. The bulb industry grew up or expanded in response to the absence of profit from traditional crops, availability of cheap land in the depression, and the provision of access to urban markets by the railways. The years 1885-92 showed an increase in bulb growers in the Spalding area of 22-fold. Paddison was 50 miles from Spalding so was well removed from the main centre although in the same county.

Shipwrecks appeared to provide a little income for a man with transport and labour. On 9 December 1893 he recorded '2 oak posts, 20 ft of oak plank; 1 oak rail; long pieces of oak; ship's bell (10s) coal and leading - total £4 2s'.²⁶ In the same ledger sales of snowdrops in August 1895 were made to buyers in Long Sutton and Retford in quantities of 10,000, 15,000 and 20,000.

Intricate accounts were made with tradesman on a barter basis. For example the miller, the carpenter, the blacksmith and pig killer all appeared in accounts where services and labour were set against goods supplied. This suggests a small round of credit and debt which would ensure the continuation of labour. Paddison could afford to allow credit with local men to ensure a sale. At the end of August 1892 he sold a flecked heifer in calf to a Mr English for £18, 'and he pays me when he gets his harvest in'.²⁷ The risk taken was probably small and short term with the

²¹ LAO, Paddison deposit 2/6.

²² LAO, Paddison deposit 2/2, farm accounts.

²³ LAO, Paddison deposit 1/1, rough ledger 1888-97.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ BPP, 1895, XVI, *Reports of Assistant Commissioners to the Royal Commission on Agricultural Depression: Lincolnshire* by Mr W Fox, p 123.

²⁶ LAO, Paddison deposit 1/1/58.

²⁷ LAO, Paddison deposit 2/2/180.

harvest imminent. On other occasions he lent poor men cash at a rate of interest. The only long-term debtor who caused Paddison some anxiety was the rector. Here was a delicate situation. Paddison was apparently restrained by some nicety from pursuing his debt through a solicitor, as he did of a man who flitted owing £8 rent on a piece of land. The rector was not likely to flit, but the debt must have been an embarrassment and annoyance. The rector's debt reveals another diversification on Paddison's part. Paddison apparently supplied him with newspapers, and records that the rector owed £3 16s from 15 July 1891 to end of 1894.²⁸

While he pursued debtors, Paddison sympathized with those in distress because of business failure in hard times, although this sympathy was tempered by a Victorian, nonconformist, cold comfort. In 1895 when a neighbour's sheep were sold at Louth market because of bankruptcy, he comforted the bereft farmer with the words, 'Whom the Lord loveth he chastiseth'.²⁹ The neighbour died later in the year and Paddison recounted in his diary the man's downfall by mortgagees who treated him cruelly.

VI

It appears that Paddison's practice was to hire a boy for the year for general duties. Joe Hird was a fixture for many years as general foreman, working in both the coal-yard and on the farm. Other labour was acquired locally on an *ad hoc* basis, sometimes at a daily rate (15s weekly for an experienced man in 1892), sometimes at piece rate, and sometimes by barter. There is also evidence that Paddison paid small private gangs at harvest time: for example, a man called North seems to have supplied a small gang in 1881.³⁰ Outgoings in

TABLE 4
Frank North's account c 1889

Items	s	d
Diking	8	3
Diking Isaacs close	2	3
Beans thrashing	5	0
3 days work	6	0
1 [day] thrashing	2	6
1 days work	2	0
Peas thrashing	4	0
3 days hoeing peas	6	0

Source: LAD, Paddison deposit 2/2.

September of that year include 'F North, harvesting £1 6s 1d; North and company harvesting £6 16s 5d; F North harvesting £4 14s Chapel [field] beans – North's company £2'. In the same year machine men (presumably with a threshing machine) were paid 4s per day. In 1885 three 'men at machine' were paid only 9s, indicating a drop in wages between 1881 and 1885. In an undated entry between 1886 and 1892 (possibly 1889), details of an account with Frank North are recorded (Table 4).

This account is likely to indicate a mixture of piece and day rates. If Frank North was the middleman in these arrangements, the rate of payment must have dropped to even lower than 2s per day for most tasks. A little more, 2s 6d, was paid for the vigorous, dusty job of threshing. These rates would suggest that Paddison was paying less for his agricultural labour in this period, in contrast to Wilson Fox's figures of summer weekly earnings of ordinary labourers at Louth, which between 1871 and 1891 were stable at 15s.³¹

In 1893 a servant girl called Ann came to live in the Paddison household at the wage of £10 a year. It would seem that Paddison gave his confined servants a form of written contract stating wages and sometimes duties. Ann was hired on an annual

²⁸ LAO, Paddison deposit 1/1, rough ledger 1888–97.

²⁹ LAO, Miscellaneous deposit 731.

³⁰ LAO, Paddison deposit 6/2/37 and 2/2/187.

³¹ A Wilson Fox, 'Agricultural wages in England and Wales during the last half century', *Jnl Roy Stat Soc*, LXVI, 1903, pp 273–348, appendix III.

basis.³² If she fell ill, she would be paid for two weeks and then have to leave. Two weeks later on 23 November Ann was paid 5s. Joe Hird, the foreman, probably received more than one missive of advice. The following neatly sets out Paddison's theory on man-management.

As to work try and find out all the most quick and best ways of doing it. Next, your management of men, these are far more difficult to deal with than animals. Some foremen have a great fear lest the men should not speak well of them, but one thing is quite certain, if a foreman does his duty to his master and fills the place for which he was hired, the men will not speak well of him ... Do not make yourself very familiar with your men, for that will breed contempt, always speak very pleasantly to them and be patient and willing to tell them anything about their work which they like to ask, but keep your plans unknown to them, and never for one moment enter into their conversation if it consists of old wives tales, pulling other people to pieces, or even meddling with the business of other people.³³

VII

If anyone could ride out the storm of a depression, it would be a man such as Paddison, intelligent, hard-working and mean. He accounted for pennies; he fought for his rights although he did not succeed in his grievance over the lost tenancy; he chased debtors but, in the case of the rector's debt, he hung on and waited and charged interest. The legends of Paddison in the village today, handed on to grandchildren and great-grandchildren of his contemporaries, describe a rather crafty, unpopular man who drove a hard bargain and looked over the shoulder of his employees in a way that was interpreted as spying. Paddison was a farmer and trader by nature; he was reared in the ethos of hard work, and the combination of nature and nurture, in his case, made a successful man.

In the early years of the depression, the

cause was largely ascribed to the weather. By the time of the Royal Commission in 1895 many agriculturists paid attention to the general economic context. Paddison himself, whilst always complaining of weather conditions, could see that the cause was deeper than that. In his rough letter-book he wrote to an unnamed person: 'There are only two practical ways of raising the scale of agricultural prices – one protection, the other dealing with the currency. Removal of local burdens would not make more than one or two shillings an acre at the outside. The only remedy for the depression was to be found in the increased skill, energy, industry and thriftfulness of the persons engaged in the greatest of our interests ...'.³⁴ It is unclear whether he was referring to farmers in this last sentence or to parliamentarians – or to farm labourers. It is interesting that he minimizes the burden of local rates and taxes as he was an ardent complainant about the payment of tithe. Saltfleetby did not have its tithes commuted at enclosure as did most, but by no means all, Lincolnshire parishes. Paddison's main objection was that half the money paid in tithe went to the incumbent of the Church of England.

Falling prices due to the import of cheap grain combined with poor harvests and economic depression were the most conspicuous feature of the period 1875–95. Wheat and wool declined from the 1870s; cattle and sheep prices fell in the 1880s although less dramatically than wheat. National prices were not necessarily those of the Lincolnshire markets. Market prices given in returns include the middleman's profit, while cereal prices were also seasonal, tending to fall in autumn and rise in spring. If a farmer could afford to hang on to commodities until after Christmas when prices rose he was in a position to gain: Paddison with money in the bank through-

³² LAO, Paddison deposit 2/2/149, farm accounts 1890–92.

³³ LAO, Paddison deposit 1/1, rough ledger 1888–97.

³⁴ LAO, Paddison deposit 6/1/10V.

out the period was able to take advantage of this situation.

Paddison's tale, seen with hindsight, is a pattern-book for economic survival. Several elements aided this survival: he was in a sound position at the start of the depression, having his farm stocked and money in the bank; his father died in 1878 which left him to make his own decisions, one of which was to buy land next to the railway station which reached Saltfleetby in 1877; he was flexible in his farming views and willing to diversify into coal and bulbs for instance; the land in Saltfleetby was excellent grazing land which was helpful particularly when corn prices were low; he was intelligent and literate, always ready to read, learn and observe, aiding his effectiveness as a farmer; he kept accounts and was a sharp businessman, keen to follow up debts, for instance; although he was childless, labour was available, sometimes on a semi-barter arrangement; Saltfleetby was an open village of many small owners which made land transfer of small parcels of land possible throughout his life, facilitating his accumulation of a holding; and he valued the Protestant ethics of hard work and carefulness with money to the point of meanness. These were the advantages Paddison held but there were disadvantages too. In 1895 he lost the tenancy of some land when the owner died, and although aggrieved he was by this date in too strong a financial position to be seriously wounded. Because he was willing to speculate in entrepreneurial fashion on wool, acting as a merchant, there was a loss at times but, on balance, his skill in merchandizing was productive.

His situation contradicts Reed's view of the small farmer of that time as a household producer, but does support Mills' belief in an entrepreneurial type amongst small farmers, as he was controlling a value-added situation to his own advantage and speculating on new ventures, notably coal and bulbs. Mills' peasant model is 'a unit of

production, as well as of consumption'.³⁵ Paddison fits his model in that respect but differs inasmuch as he matched other groups in rural society (notably large tenant farmers) in depending on his own and hired labour.

Political theorists at the time of the depression were convinced that peasant proprietors were natural conservatives. It was argued that small farms produced a greater output per acre and suffered less from falling prices than did the large farms. Whether this was so or not requires more substantial argument and examples, but Paddison by the time of the depression was neither small nor large. Orwin and Whetham argue that small farms flourished where they adopted intensified systems: one must conclude that Paddison, helped by circumstances, did the right things.³⁶

One of Paddison's strengths was that he was truly a mixed farmer so he could benefit from the various elements of that system. When it was not applicable, by the use of diversification, particularly coal and bulbs, he could use his labour and carts effectively and make a profit. His initiative to enter the bulb industry was an unexpected move in a marshland area. By such thrusts and sallies Paddison showed himself a worthy adversary of the depression. The recession was not insurmountable when attacked by the strength of such a marshland peasant-proprietor. Paddison was extraordinary in his enterprise and success. A wily mind and the convenience of the railway were assets that helped him to use his resources to the maximum. The land-ownership structure of the village made possible the advantageous acquisition of parcels of land as they arose. The rich grazing of the area combined with the virtual elimination of fallowing provided

³⁵ M Reed, 'Class and conflict in rural England: some reflections on a debate', and D R Mills, 'Peasants and conflict in nineteenth-century rural England', in M Reed and R Wells, eds, *Class, Conflict and Protest in the English Countryside, 1700-1880*, 1990,

pp 1-28, 116.
³⁶ Orwin and Whetham, *History of British Agriculture*, p 284.

both Paddison and the parish with a reasonably rewarding farming base. It would be hard to find a better model of a small man surviving the agricultural problems of the last quarter of the century. Thirsk writing of the agricultural depression in

Lincolnshire noted that the 'smaller details of personal enterprise have passed unrecorded'.³⁷ This paper offers a record of one such personal enterprise.

³⁷ Thirsk, *English Peasant Farming*, p 333.

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