

Agricultural change and the development of foxhunting in the eighteenth century*

by Jane Bevan

Abstract

This article explores the development of 'modern' foxhunting in the eighteenth century, focussing particularly on the East Midlands and Suffolk. The relationship between landscape change and foxhunting is examined by looking in detail at the hunting careers of leading foxhunters and where they chose to hunt. Hunting diaries and enclosure records are used to challenge the received view that enclosure and the spread of grassland stimulated the new style of hunting.

For the last 45 years, historians of both the landscape and foxhunting have attributed the rise of foxhunting as a fashionable sport in the eighteenth century to the shift from arable to grassland following enclosure by parliamentary statute. Bovill was the first to note the link, writing in 1962, 'but for enclosure foxhunting would never have become a popular sport'. This view was echoed by Patten in 1971 and repeated by Longrigg and Carr in their respective histories of English foxhunting published in consecutive years in the mid-1970s. Longrigg commented on the '1,539 private enclosure acts ... [resulting in] the improvement of the countryside for foxhunting ... [with] large well fenced fields of permanent grass'. Hugo Meynell (1735–1808), hunting in Leicestershire, is generally recognized as the 'father of modern foxhunting' and Itzkowitz connected Meynell's improved hound breeding explicitly to the post-enclosure change in land use: 'The new speed of Meynell's hounds was perfectly suited to the large expanses of grass which made Leicestershire ... the best hunting-ground in England'. By 1987 Williamson and Bellamy were attributing 'the rise of foxhunting' at least partly to the 'gradual spread of enclosure'.¹

Twenty years later, Landry, Griffin and Finch have all explored various aspects of the 'hunting landscape' with the latter commenting that 'the emergence of modern foxhunting alongside the newly enclosed landscape of the shires was symbiotic'. Finch, however, has also sounded a

* I am grateful to Professor Tom Williamson for improving this article. Dr Jonathan Finch and an anonymous referee made very constructive suggestions. Philip Judge patiently redrew the maps. The staff of the County Record Offices in Leicester, Northampton and Bury St. Edmunds and the Hunting Museum in Melton Mowbrey were all very helpful. The Trustees of the Goodwood Collection kindly gave permission for the reproduction of Figure 2.

¹ E. W. Bovill, *English country life* (1962), p. 200; J. Patten, 'Fox coverts for the squire', *Country Life*, 23 Sept. 1971, pp. 736–38; R. Longrigg, *The history of foxhunting* (1975), p. 89; R. Carr, *English fox hunting* (1976), p. 68; D. Itzkowitz, *Peculiar privilege – a social history of English foxhunting* (1977), p. 8; T. Williamson and L. Bellamy, *Property and landscape* (1987), p. 201.

note of caution, 'the chronological relationship between parliamentary enclosure and sporting development is less apparent than might be expected' having pointed out that Meynell's home parish of Quorndon wasn't enclosed until 1762–3, some ten years after he became Master and embarked on his hound-breeding programme.²

This article examines the truth of the orthodoxy that the development of modern foxhunting was somehow stimulated by eighteenth-century parliamentary enclosure in the East Midlands and the consequent spread of unified ownership and grassland. To investigate this, we shall explore how contemporary foxhunters experienced and used the landscape by comparing their personal hunting diaries – a much neglected resource – to the official records of landscape change: enclosure awards and maps.³

To understand the relationship between hunting and the landscape it is first necessary to look at the practice of hunting. The traditional style of hunting pursued by country squires is well described by the hunting historian Paget as involving an early start (when the foxes' bellies were still full from night time hunting), over undrained and unenclosed country with 'slow, heavy and unclipped horses' so 'a fast hound was not required'.⁴ The squires hunted when the impulse took them and their hounds would hunt hare, fox or deer indiscriminately. Partida has recently re-discovered a map, dated 1684, of Thomas Ward's estate in Hardwick, Northamptonshire, showing five horsemen with a small pack of nine hounds hunting a fox over an enclosed landscape of large grass fields. The light framed, harrier-like hounds exemplify Paget's comment that 'the line between harriers [hare hounds] and fox hounds did not exist in the early eighteenth century or earlier'.⁵ This scene illustrates the early, small-scale hunting style of local landowners and Partida adds the significant point that 'all the adjoining townships are still open at this date' so if the fox led Ward off his own land, he would be hunting over an open landscape.⁶

This pattern of foxhunting before the 1750s, taking place over a mixed landscape, is well illustrated by Figure 1, which shows some of the principal centres of early foxhunting with the enclosure dates of parishes in Leicestershire and Rutland. It is striking that Thomas Boothby's base at Tooley Park, just south-west of Leicester, was surrounded by early-enclosed parishes. Boothby started foxhunting in 1697 and was an uncle of Hugo Meynell.⁷ By contrast the Rutland parishes fringing Cottesmore hunted by Sir Henry Lowther from 1666 to 1695 were mainly subject to much later parliamentary enclosure, including Cottesmore itself, which was not enclosed until 1800, so much of the hunting was over common fields.⁸

In a move towards more organized, larger-scale hunting, the Confederate Pack was formed in Leicestershire in 1728 by the third Duke of Rutland, the Earls of Cardigan and Gainsborough,

² D. Landry, *The invention of the countryside* (2001); E. Griffin, *Blood sport* (2007); J. Finch, 'Wider famed countries: historic landscape characterization in the Midland shires', *Landscapes*, 8 (2007), p. 55; id., 'What were the pastures of Leicester to me?' *International J. Cultural Property*, 14 (2007), p. 373; id., 'Grass, grass, grass: fox-hunting and the creation of the modern landscape' *Landscapes* 5 (2004), p. 45.

³ The undoubted influence of tenure on the develop-

ment of foxhunting is not explored in this short article.

⁴ G. Paget, *The history of the Althorp and Pytchley Hunt, 1634–1920* (1937), p. 39.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

⁶ T. Partida, 'The early hunting landscapes of Northamptonshire', *Northamptonshire Past and Present*, 60 (2007), p. 56.

⁷ Longrigg, *History of foxhunting*, p. 43.

⁸ *Baily's Hunting Directory, 1992–3* (1992), p. 32.

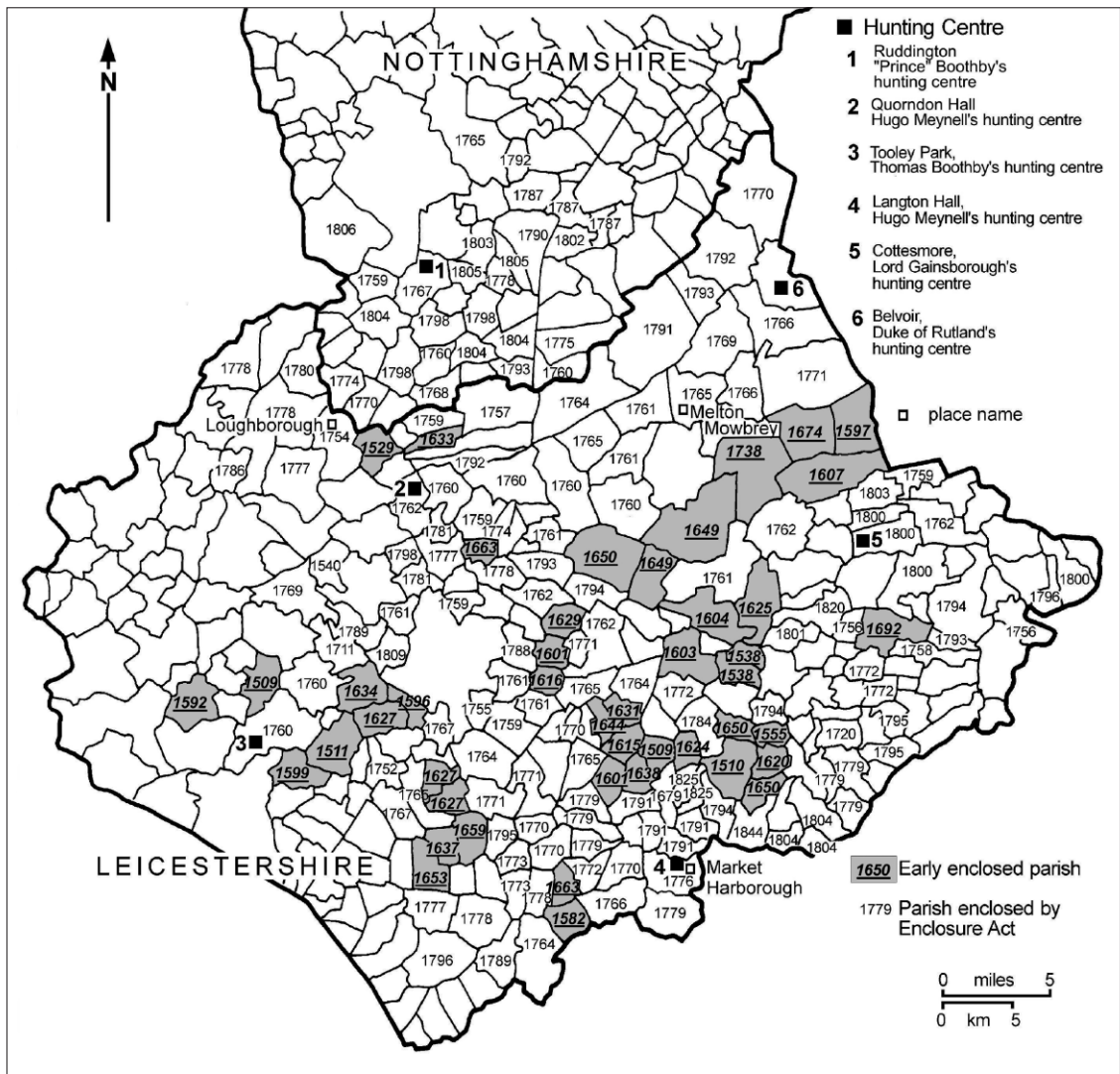


FIGURE 1. The principle centres of early foxhunting in Leicestershire and Rutland, with parish enclosure dates.

Sources: enclosure dates taken from W. E. Tate and M. E. Turner, *A Domesday of English enclosure acts* (1978), pp. 153–8; hunting centres from R. Longrigg, *The history of foxhunting* (1975); R. Carr, *English fox hunting* (1976).

and Lords Gower and Howe. They hunted from Croxton (not enclosed until 1794) from mid-October, at Exton (enclosed in 1800) in December and January, and from Clawson (enclosed in 1791) until the end of March.⁹ Much of their hunting was over common fields although this did not necessarily mean crossing arable or fallow land, because parts of the common fields were being converted to pasture leys, and beasts were either tethered there to fatten or supervised by herdsmen. Thirsk has emphasized the spread of grassland in the century up to 1760 in

⁹ Longrigg, *History of foxhunting*, p. 62.

Leicestershire, particularly east of the River Soar (which runs north through Leicester), where poorly drained soils developed on the chalky boulder clays overlying Liassic clay.¹⁰ Elsewhere, Thirsk gave Wigston Magna near Leicester as an example of the changes, since grass leys took up on average a fifth of the total area of the common fields in the seventeenth century and first half of the eighteenth.¹¹ The grassland, fallows, stubbles, headlands and network of footpaths over common fields provided good access, unimpeded by fences, for mounted foxhunters. Hounds, light on their feet and spread out hunting as a pack, could cross grassland, sown, harvested or fallow arable land, without causing significant damage.

I

A brief review of the history of enclosure provides a vital context for exploring the development of hunting in Leicestershire and neighbouring counties. Much of the area's soils are clay loams or loams over a clay subsoil with poor drainage.¹² The difficulties of cultivating these intractable soils encouraged their conversion from arable use to enclosed pasture. The move to livestock farming was accelerated in the clay vales after about 1650 by falling grain prices¹³ contrasting with the increasingly profitable market for wool, hides, meat and dairy produce.¹⁴ Wordie has estimated that around 17 per cent of Leicestershire, by area, was enclosed before 1599 with another 34 per cent by 1699; the remaining half lay mainly in open fields, with some woodland such as Charnwood Forest.¹⁵ Hall has calculated the comparable figures for Northamptonshire in a slightly different way, by the number of townships enclosed – not by acreage. He noted that 16 per cent of townships were enclosed by 1599 with another 15 per cent by 1699. So two thirds of the county's townships remained unenclosed in 1700.¹⁶ The overwhelming majority of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century enclosure was associated with the conversion of arable open fields to grass.¹⁷ In these 'early enclosed' areas, some new closes were converted to permanent pasture, while in others a system of convertible husbandry was adopted.¹⁸ This alternated arable and grazing use; stock fertilized the land and the farmer's income was derived from both grain and animal sales.

The subsequent history of enclosure in Leicestershire will be shown to have a marked effect on the location of Hugo Meynell's hunting activities. Although around half of Leicestershire's parishes were wholly or partially enclosed by 1700, only a further 7 per cent of the county area was enclosed in the next 60 years.¹⁹ Meynell started hunting in 1753, during this lull, but his locale was soon caught up in a flurry of activity when, between 1760 and 1799, a further

¹⁰ VCH, *Leicestershire*, II, p. 224.

¹¹ G. E. Mingay, 'The East Midlands: Northamptonshire, Leicestershire, Rutland ...', in J. Thirsk (ed.), *The agrarian history of England and Wales*, V, 1640–1750 (2 vols, 1985), i, p. 95.

¹² B. Avery, D. Findley and D. Mackney, *Soil map of England and Wales*, 1:1,000,000 Ordnance Survey for Soil Survey of England and Wales (1975).

¹³ J. Thirsk, *Agricultural regions and agrarian history in England, 1500–1750* (1987), p. 42.

¹⁴ M. Reed, 'Enclosure in north Buckinghamshire, 1500–1750', *AgHR* 32 (1984), p. 38.

¹⁵ J. R. Wordie, 'The chronology of English enclosure, 1500–1914', *EHR* 36 (1983), p. 498.

¹⁶ D. Hall, 'Enclosure in Northamptonshire', *Northamptonshire Past and Present*, 9 (1998), p. 358.

¹⁷ T. Williamson, *The transformation of rural England* (2002), p. 54.

¹⁸ Thirsk, *Agricultural regions*, p. 41.

¹⁹ Wordie, 'Chronology of English enclosure', p. 498.

TABLE 1. Parliamentary enclosure of open-field arable before 1793.

County	Percentage of parliamentary enclosure enacted before 1793	Of which, open-field arable
Leicestershire	78.1	78.0
Northamptonshire	61.9	61.7
Nottinghamshire	52.3	48.3
Rutland	42.4	42.4

Source: M. E. Turner, *English parliamentary enclosure: its history, geography and economic history* (1980), p. 72.

35.5 per cent of Leicestershire was enclosed, of which over three quarters had previously been in open fields.²⁰

Table 1 shows that Leicestershire was significantly more affected by parliamentary enclosure of open fields during the eighteenth century than flanking counties. Turner has also shown that a sizeable area of the East Midlands still remained in open field agriculture up until a second surge of enclosure triggered by the Napoleonic wars. Between 1793 and 1815 a further 18.8 per cent of Rutland's open field acreage was enclosed, 12.3 per cent of Northamptonshire's, 11.3 per cent of Nottinghamshire's, and 5.5 per cent of Leicestershire's.²¹

When land was enclosed, it was not automatically seeded for permanent pasture. By the end of the eighteenth century Pitt estimated that in Leicestershire and Rutland there were 240,000 acres in 'temporary tillage' (as a result of convertible husbandry alternating arable and pastoral use) with a matching acreage of 'permanent grass' and a further 20,000 acres of 'wasteland' (out of a total land area of 608,000 acres).²²

II

To examine the relationship between foxhunting and the landscape changes created by enclosure, we will look in more detail at the hunting career of a leading foxhunter and where he chose to hunt. Although there have been challenges by Middleton and Griffin,²³ it is still generally accepted that the modern style of foxhunting was first popularized in the East Midlands where, from 1753, Hugo Meynell was master of a Leicestershire pack of foxhounds. He introduced the idea of mid-morning meets so that foxes ran faster (having digested their night-time feed), which necessitated breeding a different style of hound – speedier and with more stamina. Although previous writers have attributed this change in the style of foxhunting in the mid-eighteenth century to the spread of enclosure, with a resultant expansion of grassland and hedges, Meynell himself was not an enthusiastic jumper. Ellis, historian of the Quorn Hunt,

²⁰ Ibid., p. 498.

²¹ M. E. Turner, *English parliamentary enclosure: its history, geography and economic history* (1980), p. 187.

²² W. Pitt, *A general view of the agriculture of*

Leicestershire and Rutland (1813), pp. 5–6.

²³ I. Middleton, 'The origins of English fox hunting and the myth of Hugo Meynell and the Quorn', *Sports in History* 5 (2005), pp. 1–16; Griffin, *Blood sport*, p. 126.

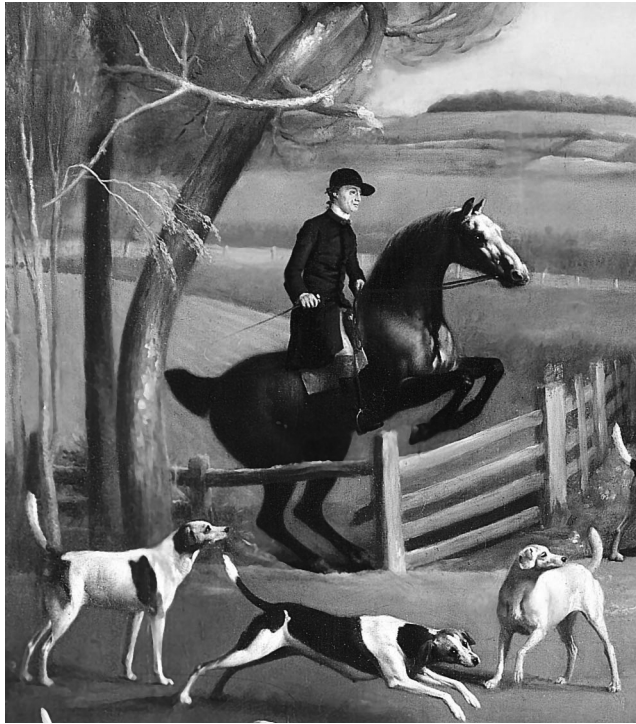


FIGURE 2. Detail from 'The 3rd Duke of Richmond with the Charlton Hunt', George Stubbs, 1759–60.

Source: Goodwood Collection.

recorded that his horses were encouraged to 'rear on their hind legs and jump gates and stiles standing in the most sober ... way', but, as the detail from a Stubbs painting of 1760 illustrating hunting in Sussex (Figure 2) shows, this would have been both uncomfortable and potentially dangerous because of the lack of momentum.²⁴

So it seems unlikely that Meynell would have deliberately sought out a fenced landscape to hunt over. A contemporary is quoted as saying that Meynell 'considered horses merely as vehicles to the hounds' while Ellis added that Meynell 'would have been quite content ... to go on forever forging through the deep country and taking the fences, very occasionally, as they came'.²⁵ Peter Beckford, whose highly influential *Thoughts on hunting* was published in 1781, acknowledged a more general lack of enthusiasm for jumping: he advised other huntsmen to 'dismount at once, when you come to a leap that you do not chose to take'.²⁶

Ellis believed that:

Meynell's chosen country was essentially the long strip of rolling open land running the forty miles from Nottingham to Market Harborough, which he was the first to recognize as the finest in the world ... near enough to the northern end of it was Quorndon Hall [Meynell's home] ... Near enough to the southern end of it was Langton Hall, which he rented about 1762, living there – presumably for part of each season ... and kennelling the hounds at Bowden Inn.²⁷

²⁴ C. Ellis, *Leicestershire and the Quorn* (1951), p. 27.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

²⁶ P. Beckford, *Thoughts on hunting* (1781, 1911 edn), p. 99.

²⁷ Ellis, *Leicestershire and the Quorn*, p. 11.

TABLE 2. Total number of landowners in the Soar Valley, 1781–1800.

Year	Barrow-upon-Soar	Quorndon	Silesby	Mountsorrel
Date of enclosure act	1760	1762	1759	1781
Acreage enclosed by act	2250	1480	2153	279
1781	109	95	87	150
1790	109	91	89	129
1800	107	90	122	129

Source: Leicestershire Record Office [hereafter LRO], Quorndon enclosure act (1762), DE113/4.

Meynell's choice of an optimum hunting landscape can be examined at three stages in his career as a Master of Fox Hounds (MFH). Initially, from 1753, Meynell hunted from Quorndon on the valley side of the Soar where he owned land and kennels. During his early hunting career, he honed his skills hunting over predominantly open land, and only resorting to woodland in spring and autumn. But, by 1760, enclosure was rapidly taking place in a swathe of parishes around Quorndon culminating in the enclosure act for the parish itself in 1762.²⁸ The consequent changes in land use from open common fields are clearly described by Pitt; he notes that at Queniborough, south-east of Quorndon, prior to enclosure 'the land had for the greater part been, time immemorial, in the three shift tillage, 1 wheat, 2 beans, 3 fallow ... and was pretty much exhausted'.²⁹ By contrast 'Quorndon now first rate sheep land and carrying great crops of barley and green sheep food'.³⁰ The 1801 crop returns record Quorndon as having 124 acres under wheat, 214 under barley with 50 acres in oats and 92 acres in 'turnips or rape'.³¹ The enclosure act of 1762 awarded 1,480 acres (out of a total parish acreage of 1990) so after almost 40 years around 32 per cent of the enclosed area remained under arable use, often in a convertible system.³²

Joyce's study of the enclosure of four contiguous parishes, including Quorndon, is significant because the volume of landowners suggests a landscape around Quorndon divided into many fenced, privately-owned allotments even before any subdivision into smaller fields took place. Table 2 demonstrates that, despite a turnover of landowners in each parish of 15–20 per cent per decade, the number of landowners did not fall significantly between 1781 and 1800 (apart from Mountsorrel, where enclosure took place later), and that 'small ownership and owner occupancy remained significant throughout the period' in all four parishes.³³

Enclosure acts required that boundary fences were planted round the initial allotments promptly; for example, the act for Quorndon, where Meynell is listed as an owner, stated that:

²⁸ The date of the enclosure act is used throughout this paper. The award is usually in the same or following year; the award for Quorndon was made in 1763.

²⁹ Pitt, *General view ... Leicestershire and Rutland*, p. 71.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 76.

³¹ M. E. Turner (ed.), *Home Office Acreage Returns*

(HO 67): *List and Analysis* (List and Index Society, 190, 1982).

³² W. E. Tate and M. E. Turner, *A domesday of English enclosure acts and awards* (1978).

³³ S. Joyce, 'Enclosure and landholding in the Soar Valley', *Trans. of the Leicestershire Archaeological and Historical Soc.* 73 (1999), p. 42.

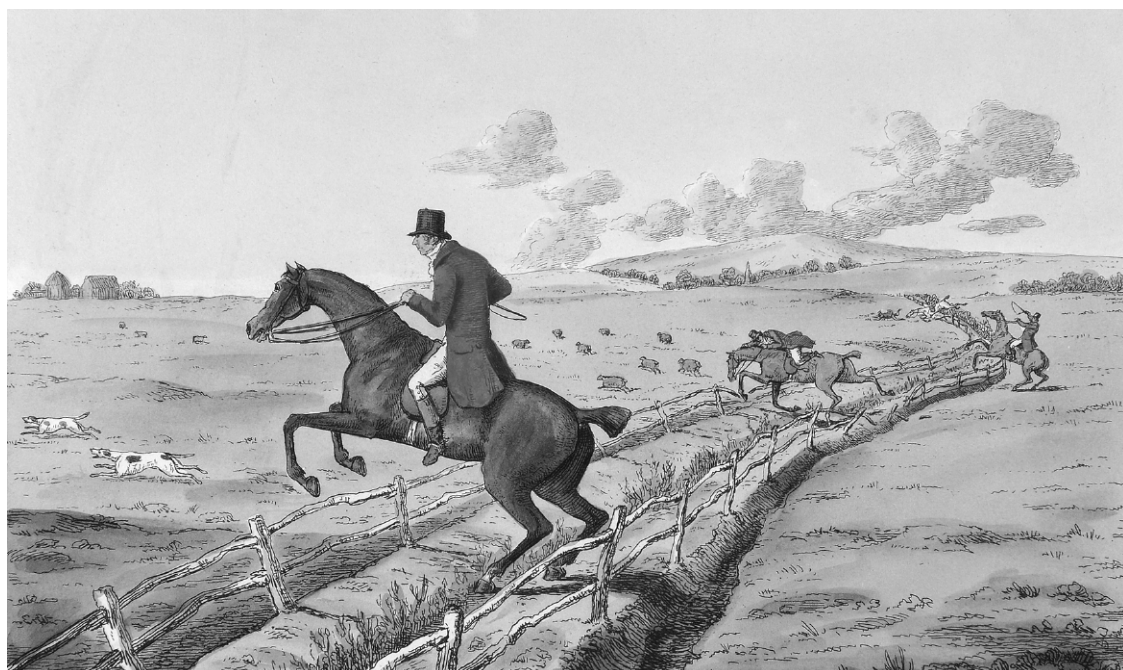


FIGURE 3. 'Going in and out clear' from a series on 'Indispensable accomplishments' by Sir Robert Frankland, 1811.

Source: Photo courtesy of James Harvey British Art.

It is further enacted and declared that all the hedges, ditches and fences to be made for inclosure and dividing the said open and common fields, meadows and commons ... shall within the space of eighteen months ... [the owner must] set down and place posts and rails, back fence by throwing up earth or make any other fence outside the ditch.³⁴

Figure 3, illustrating hunting in the second decade of the nineteenth century, some eleven years after Meynell retired as MFH, shows the challenges posed to foxhunters traversing newly enclosed grassland where nascent hedges were protected by double ditches and rails. If they wanted to continue to hunt in the area, Meynell and his followers were clearly going to have to either master jumping fences; or take the slow option of using field gates, once the 'convenient gaps and openings ... for the passage of cattle, carts and carriages' left in the new fences had been closed after 'the space of twelve calendar months'; or hunt elsewhere.³⁵ The map of Wymeswold (Figure 4), a parish north-east of Quorndon showing the allotments replacing six open fields in the enclosure act of 1757, illustrates the subdivision of the countryside following enclosure. The heavy soils of the gently undulating plateau are typical of boulder clays overlying Lias clay; 2891 acres out of a total parish acreage of 3373 were enclosed; almost 50 years later the 1801 Crop Returns reveal that 23 per cent of the parish was still in arable use.³⁶

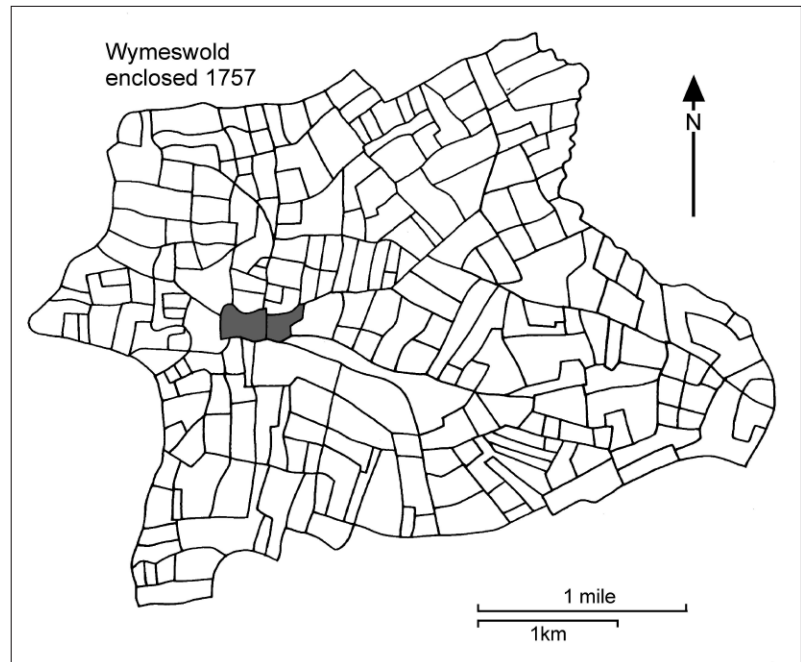
³⁴ Leicestershire Record Office (hereafter LRO), Quorndon Enclosure Act (1762), DE113/4.

³⁵ LRO, DE113/4.

³⁶ Turner, *Home Office Acreage Returns*.

FIGURE 4. Allotment boundaries taken from the enclosure map of Wymeswold, 1757.

Source: LRO, Enclosure Map of Wymeswold (1757), EN/MA/366/1.



It is striking that, in the same year that the enclosure act for Quorndon was made (1762), Meynell rented Langton Hall on the heavy Lias clays just north of Market Harborough; the most likely reason, given his antipathy to jumping, is that it gave him excellent access to the Langtons and other adjacent unenclosed parishes to the north-east. Together the Langton parishes totalled 4409 acres, of which only around 690 acres 'was considered to be old inclosure, chiefly in West Langton' where in 1743 three open fields, Wheat field, Bean field, and Fallow field, each contained at least five closes totaling over half of the parish's enclosed land.³⁷

Hoskins observed that organized foxhunting developed in the 1770s, in time for foxhunters to enjoy the exhilaration of galloping over miles of unfenced country; this echoes the assertion made four years earlier by Ellis that foxhunting tradition is quite definite that Meynell hunted mainly in unfenced country.³⁸ But even the Langton parishes were finally enclosed, in a flurry of activity after acts passed in 1791, and Figure 5 shows the problems faced by foxhunters who disliked jumping, such as Meynell, even before subdivision of the enclosure allotments took place (the figures on the map give the areas for selected allotments in acres, roods and perches).

As enclosure spread it became increasingly difficult for Meynell to find unenclosed countryside to hunt over. One of the last remaining unenclosed parishes between Meynell's two hunting centres of Quorndon and Langton Hall was South Croxton, north-east of Leicester. The details in the act of 1794 provide a clear picture of the segmentation of the countryside when a total of 893 acres, previously mainly in three open fields, Upper, Middle and Nether,³⁹ was divided between

³⁷ VCH, *Leicestershire*, V, pp. 193–213.

³⁸ W. G. Hoskins, *The making of the English landscape* (1978), p. 196; Ellis, *Leicestershire and the Quorn*, p. 211.

³⁹ Charnwood Borough Council Conservation and Landscape team, *South Croxton Conservation Area appraisal* (2005), p. 4

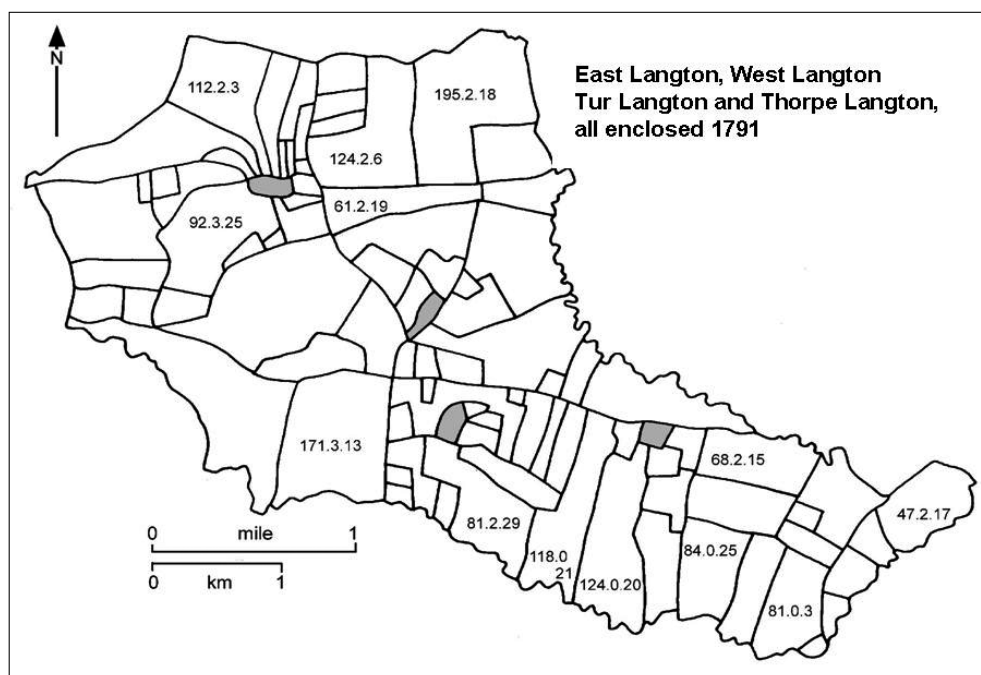


FIGURE 5. Allotment boundaries taken from the enclosure map of the Langtons, 1791.

Source: LRO Enclosure Map of Langtons (1791), EN/A/335/1.

37 owners. Table 3 shows the distribution of the 17 largest allotments, totalling over 680 acres, resulting in an average allotment size of just over 40 acres. This excludes the smaller allotments, which tended to cluster around the village and forced foxhunters crossing them to leap even more frequently. Seven years later, 36 per cent of the acreage enclosed in 1794 remained in arable use, including 52 acres of beans and 26 acres of 'turnips or rape', valuable cover for foxes.⁴⁰

The third and last stage of Meynell's career is well illustrated by the laconic diary kept from 1791 to 1800 by Thomas Jones, his whipper-in (assistant), recording the location of each day's hunting.⁴¹ Figure 6 shows all the meets in 1791 and clearly illustrates a marked drift northwards, away from Market Harborough and into a triangle bounded by Meynell's home at Quorndon Hall, close to Loughborough, Melton Mowbrey, and the hunting seat of his brother in law and great friend 'Prince' Boothby at Ruddington in South Nottinghamshire. The map demonstrates the comparative lateness of parliamentary enclosure in south Nottinghamshire, particularly parishes south of Boothby's hunting centre at Ruddington.

Table 4 shows how Meynell appears to have actively chosen to meet during 1791 in areas that were either still mainly unenclosed or close by. Meets in enclosed areas, such as Rempstone, tended to be either for cubbing in the autumn or at places easily accessible from Quorndon Hall.⁴²

⁴⁰ Turner, *Home Office Acreage Returns*.

⁴¹ T. Jones, *Diary of the Quorndon Hunt by Thomas Jones, whipper-in to the late Hugo Meynell, Derby (1816)* (repr. 2009).

⁴² Three meets were for 'cubbing', where the goal is to contain young foxes in a wood, not hunt them over the countryside, as a means of training young hounds.

TABLE 3. Allocation of land in South Croxton at enclosure, 1794.

<i>Owner</i>	<i>Acres</i>	<i>Roods</i>	<i>Perches</i>
Rector of South Croxton	12	3	10
	18	3	7
	62	0	19
John Kerchevell	41	2	2
Tithe	51	2	2
John Ayre	58	3	36
	48	1	3
John Peach Hungerford	57	1	33
	14	3	0
	28	2	22
	23	2	0
John Kerchevell	10	1	9
	86	1	5
	12	1	30
Trustees of William Pink	35	0	26
	43	3	30
William Pochin	76	2	16

Source: LRO, 'South Croxton enclosure act', MA/EN/A/24/1.

TABLE 4. Location of most popular meets for Hugo Meynell's hounds, 1791.

<i>Place</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Number of meets</i>	<i>Enclosure date</i>
Bunny	South Nottinghamshire	6	1798
Rempstone	North of Quorndon	6 (3 in October)	1768
Widmerpool	South Nottinghamshire	5	1804
Costock	Near Bunny, south Nottinghamshire (enclosed 1798)	4	1760
Walton-on-the-Wolds	East of Quorndon	3	1792
Billesdon	East of Leicester	3	1764
Syston	North-east of Leicester	3	1778
Cotes	North of Quorndon	3	1500–1700

Source: T. Jones, *Diary of the Quorndon Hunt by Thomas Jones, whipper in to the late Hugo Meynell, Derby (1816)* (repr. 2009).

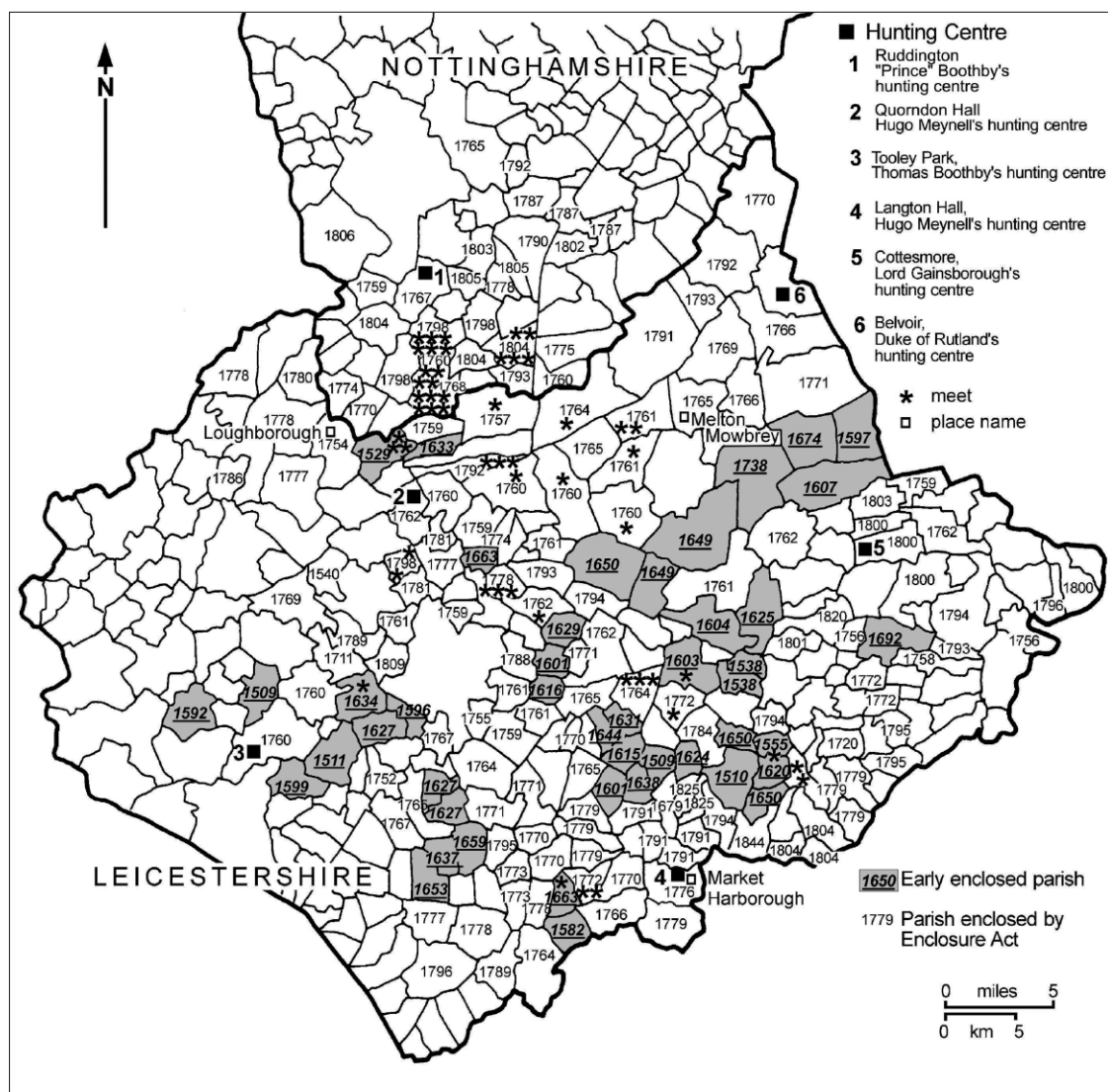


FIGURE 6. The location of Hugo Meynell's meets, 1791.

Sources: enclosure dates taken from Tate and Turner, *Domesday*, pp. 153–8; location of meets from T. Jones, *Diary of the Quorndon Hunt by Thomas Jones, whipper in to the late Hugo Meynell, Derby (1816) (repr. 2009)*.

Ruddington, Bunny and Costock all lie in the area described in 1794 by Lowe as 'Trent Bank Land' where fertile loams developed on Keuper marl fringe the river valley. Root crops were important on the light land, and incidentally benefited hunting. Lowe noted that 'occupation is mixed of arable and grass ... the arable is generally calculated for the turnip husbandry'.⁴³

⁴³ R. Lowe, *A general view of the agriculture of the County of Nottingham* (1798), p. 28; T. Jones, *Diary*.

Thomas Jones's diaries usefully give a second clue that hunting took place away from enclosed grassland areas. He mentions a range of arable crops, both cereals and roots. For example on 20 January 1794 he recorded that Meynell's hounds 'met at Budden Wood, found by the wood on some wheat' while on 16 January 1799 at 'Rempston – found a fox in stubble'.⁴⁴ Foxhounds, unlike horses, are able to cross arable crops in the early stages of growth without damage while, as already described, mounted followers would skirt the headlands or follow the network of footpaths or lanes. Although farmers were slow to adopt root crops in Midland common fields on heavy soils because of the problems with harvesting, they were grown in limited quantities on more permeable soils from the start of the eighteenth century. Steane noted the use of turnips as early as 1731 at Deene in north-east Northamptonshire; while towards the end of the century Pitt described how in Leicestershire turnips and coleseed were grown for winter feed, for sheep that were penned on the root crops with hurdles.⁴⁵ In 1796, on 3 October, Jones notes in his diary 'hit off a fox in J Harrison's turnips' and, on 24 October, 'met at Prestwold ... found in some turnips near the Turnpike road'. By October 1798 he was recording 'found another fox in some coleseed'.

Although grassland has traditionally been seen as the pre-eminent hunting terrain, arable areas provided considerable advantages for foxhunting in winter if stubbles, often easily crossed on horseback, were left until spring cultivations. Pitt, writing about Leicestershire and Rutland regretted, that although 'bean stubble should be ploughed before winter for the benefit of the amelioration of frost ... [it] is, I believe, seldom done'.⁴⁶ Land remaining fallow, pea and bean haulm, rape, coleseed and root crops all provided both cover and small rodents as prey for foxes during the hunting season. This was particularly important in lightly wooded areas such as much of Leicestershire.

By contrast to the ease with which open fields and their network of paths, baulks and headlands could be crossed, eighteenth-century grassland provided considerable challenges to mounted hunt followers. Monk noted that on the heavier land, such as that around Melton Mowbrey, 'these lands are very wet in winter and the turf so tender as scarcely to be able to bear the treading of sheep at that season without injury'.⁴⁷ Artificial drainage was rare: Pitt did not note the advent of 'tiles for hollow drainage' in Leicestershire until 1813 and the Soil Survey observed that much of this (early tile) drainage dated from the early and mid-nineteenth century.⁴⁸ Where grassland had been enclosed from arable use, ridge and furrow often remained; on the more impermeable clays the furrows could be 'from one to three feet deep in the hollows,' often waterlogged in winter and full of rushes.⁴⁹ Paget commented almost 150 years later that it still 'takes a [hunting] season to teach a horse to gallop smoothly over them; until he has learnt one feels as if one is riding a lame camel'.⁵⁰ Pitt observed that this dangerous unevenness was exacerbated where 'a number of the pastures are shamefully over-run with anthills, and to so very great a degree, that in many of them the surface of one third of the land is nearly thus

⁴⁴ Jones, *Diary*.

⁴⁵ J. Steane, *Northamptonshire landscape* (1974), p. 229; Pitt, *General view ... Leicestershire and Rutland*, p. 128.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 79.

⁴⁷ J. Monk, *A general view of the agriculture of the County of Leicestershire* (1794).

⁴⁸ Pitt, *General view ... Leicestershire and Rutland*, p. 182; A. Thomasson, *Soils of the Melton Mowbray District*, Sheet 142 (1971), p. 78.

⁴⁹ Pitt, *General view ... Leicestershire and Rutland*, p. 89.

⁵⁰ G. Paget and L. Irvine, *Leicestershire* (1950), p. 208.

covered'.⁵¹ As Broad commented, the anthills were very large and 'grass tended not to grow on such uneven lumps'.⁵² This all suggests that the popular image of eighteenth-century hunt followers fluently galloping over level pastures is highly idealized.

Earlier discussion of a small sample of 1801 crop returns for individual parishes has also emphasized that between 20 and 35 per cent of the enclosed acreage remained in arable use at any time. Finch suggests a lower figure based on a bigger sample:

documentary records of cropping rotations before enclosure suggest that between 75 per cent and 89 per cent of the acreage was arable in the open field districts of Leicestershire prior to enclosure whereas the 1801 Crop Returns show that after the first wave of enclosure acts only about one-sixth was still in arable cultivation.⁵³

By 1809 Pitt, using the slightly different base of total county area, estimated that in Leicestershire and Rutland there were 240,000 acres in 'temporary tillage' (39 per cent) out of a total county acreage of around 608,000.⁵⁴ Whichever estimate is most accurate, all undermine the traditional image of foxhounds streaming over uninterrupted Leicestershire grassland.

A second hunting diary, which overlapped the middle period of Meynell's hunting career, adds support to the theory that many foxhunters actively sought out the unenclosed landscape. Tom Noel, huntsman of the Cottesmore in the south-east of Leicestershire (or Rutland) kept a hunting diary from 1766 to 1773 described as containing 'nothing of a personal or descriptive nature – not even a hound is referred to by name – and read consecutively his entries are extremely monotonous'.⁵⁵ Nevertheless, when the locations of the meets are linked to information on enclosure dates it gives a good picture of the landscape experienced by contemporary foxhunters. Figure 1, showing the enclosure act dates of Leicestershire parishes, illustrates how the home of the Cottesmore was bracketed by parishes which remained unenclosed until 1800, and the diary suggests that these were hunted regularly. Unenclosed heaths, woodland, open fields and root crops were a vital part of the hunting system and references to all appear regularly. Tom Noel's diary has numerous records of drawing (looking for a fox) in 'turnops'. On Wednesday 16 December 1767 and Thursday 29 December 1768 he recorded 'found at Tea Turnops' (Teigh is north of Oakham) although in November 1769 he had less luck: 'Tried Garlick Hill ... all the turnops & did not find'.⁵⁶ After an interval of seven years the diary was recommenced in another, anonymous hand, also expressing enthusiasm for the unenclosed landscape. The author wrote on 28 December 1780:

Found in Empingham Wood. The hounds part for Empingham Heath [enclosed 1794] to Ketton [1768], to Forester's Bridge. Lost at Luffenham Goss [1878] ... Lost again in Empingham field, found again upon the Heath.⁵⁷

As late as 1813, North and South Luffenham (totalling 3,434 acres) were recorded respectively as

⁵¹ Pitt, *General view*, p. 59.

⁵² J. Broad, 'Alternative husbandry and permanent pasture in the Midlands, 1650–1800', *AgHR* 28 (1980), p. 87.

⁵³ Finch, 'Pastures of Leicester', p. 368.

⁵⁴ Pitt, *General view ... Leicestershire and Rutland*,

pp. 5–6.

⁵⁵ C. Simpson, *Leicestershire and its hunts: the Quorn, the Cottesmore and the Belvoir* (1922), p. 157.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 157–9.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 162. The parish enclosure act dates are taken from Tate and Turners' *Domesday*, pp. 221–2.

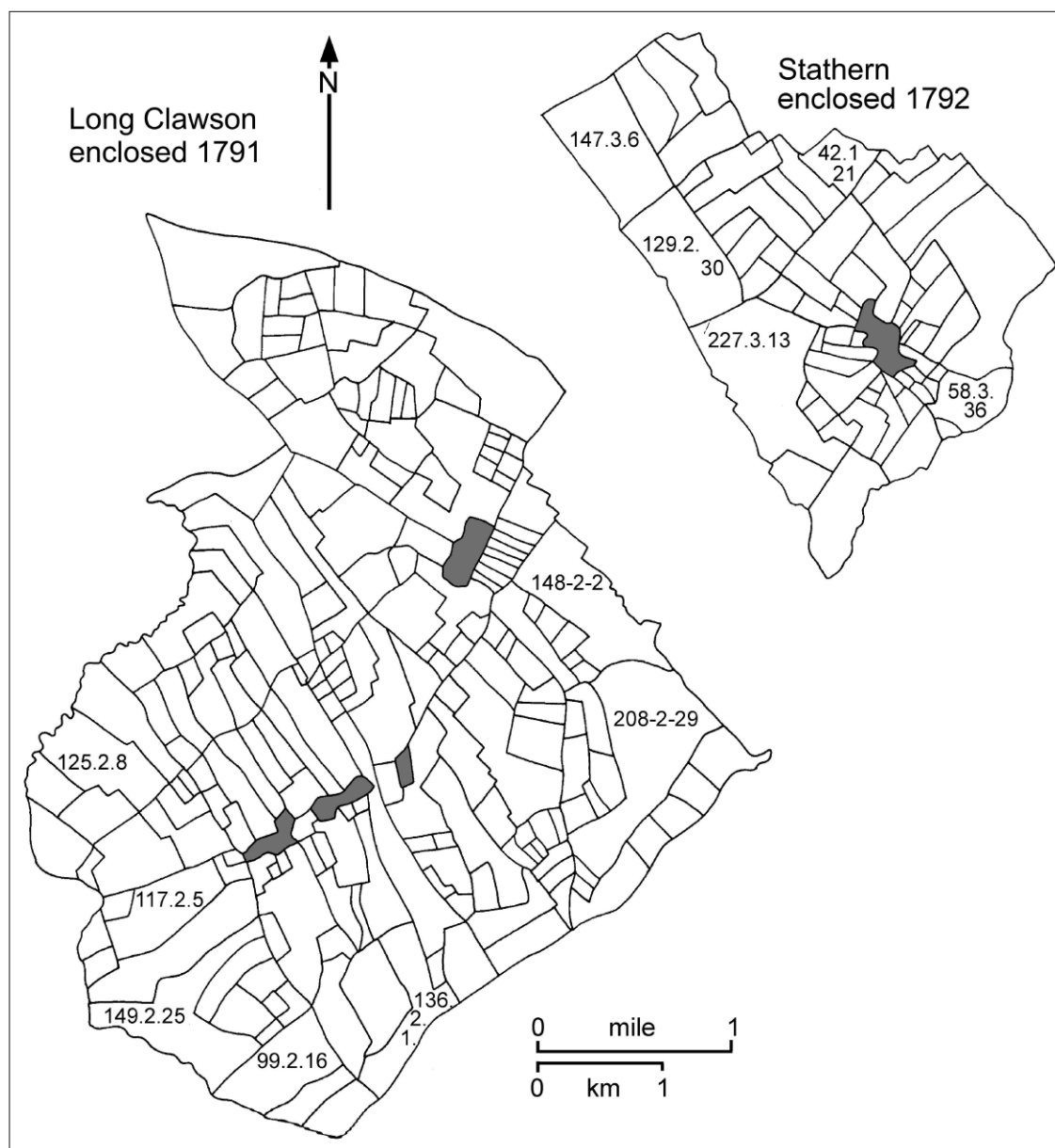


FIGURE 7. Allotment boundaries taken from the enclosure maps of Long Clawson and Stathern.

Key: Field sizes are given in acres, roods and perches.

Sources: LRO, Enclosure Map of Long Clawson, EN/A/205/1 (1791); Enclosure Map of Stathern, QS47/2/17 (1792).

being in 'open fields except a few old enclosures' and 'small enclosures and open fields', while Witwell, to the north, was 'principally open fields'; so a significant area of south east Rutland, a key part of the Cottesmore hunt country, remained at least partially open.⁵⁸

Unfortunately, we know of no diary of the eighteenth-century hunting activities of Leicestershire's third major pack, the Duke of Rutland's, which hunted from Belvoir in the north-east of the county. However there is a good selection of enclosure records and maps in the Leicestershire Record Office which show that, although some parishes near the hunt kennels were enclosed in the 1760s and 1770s, the majority in the Vale of Belvoir were not enclosed until the 1790s, as shown on Figure 1. Pitt noted in 1809 that the Duke of Rutland had enclosed 10,614 acres in three years and commented on the 'topsy-turvy' change in land use after enclosure:⁵⁹ the heavier soils of the clay Vale – which had previously lain in open fields under a three-shift system of fallow, wheat and beans – were converted to pasture; meanwhile the easier-to-work, lighter land on the scarp and Wolds – which had been sheep walk and heath – was enclosed and cultivated for arable use. Before enclosure, the Belvoir had been able to hunt over an open landscape with particularly good access over heath, sheep-walk and common fields under fallow or bean or wheat stubble. Figure 7, showing allotment boundaries copied from the enclosure maps of Long Clawson (1791) and Stathern (1792), illustrates the impact of 1790s enclosure in the Vale on foxhunters since, as elsewhere, 'if the fences are well managed they soon grow up and in seven years every appearance of the common field is obliterated'.⁶⁰ So foxhunters lost easy access via the web of paths and baulks and were forced to detour or jump hedges or gates. Despite the enthusiastic grassing down of the Vale, by 1801, 518 out of the 3,412 acres (15 per cent) enclosed in Long Clawson remained in arable use.⁶¹

III

The hunting careers of other prominent eighteenth-century foxhunters in neighbouring Northamptonshire suggest that the landscape preferences of Leicestershire foxhunters were more widely shared. Although both counties demonstrated common 'champion' landscape characteristics with little woodland, Northamptonshire retained remnants of Rockingham, Salcey and Whittlewood forests. Both counties lie mainly within the Midland Plain whose 'early modern' agricultural system was summarized by Thirsk as 'arable vale lands'.⁶² The bulk of Northamptonshire's soils are heavy clays developed on glacial boulder clays overlying Lias clay but in the north-east Oolitic limestone produces lighter soils in a landscape characterized by Thirsk as 'wolds and downland'. Figure 8 shows enclosure act dates in Northamptonshire, based on information provided by Hall, with the addition of the hunting centres of three grandes: Lords Spencer and Fitzwilliam, and the Duke of Grafton.⁶³

Figure 8 reveals a mingling of parishes that were enclosed comparatively early and parishes dealt with by parliamentary enclosure acts in the eighteenth century. Pitt writing in 1797 noted

⁵⁸ R. Parkinson, *Survey of the County of Rutland* (1813), pp. 5–6.

⁵⁹ Pitt, *General view ... Leicestershire and Rutland*, p. 14.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

⁶¹ Turner, *Home Office Acreage Returns*.

⁶² Thirsk, *Agricultural regions*.

⁶³ Hall, 'Enclosure in Northamptonshire'.

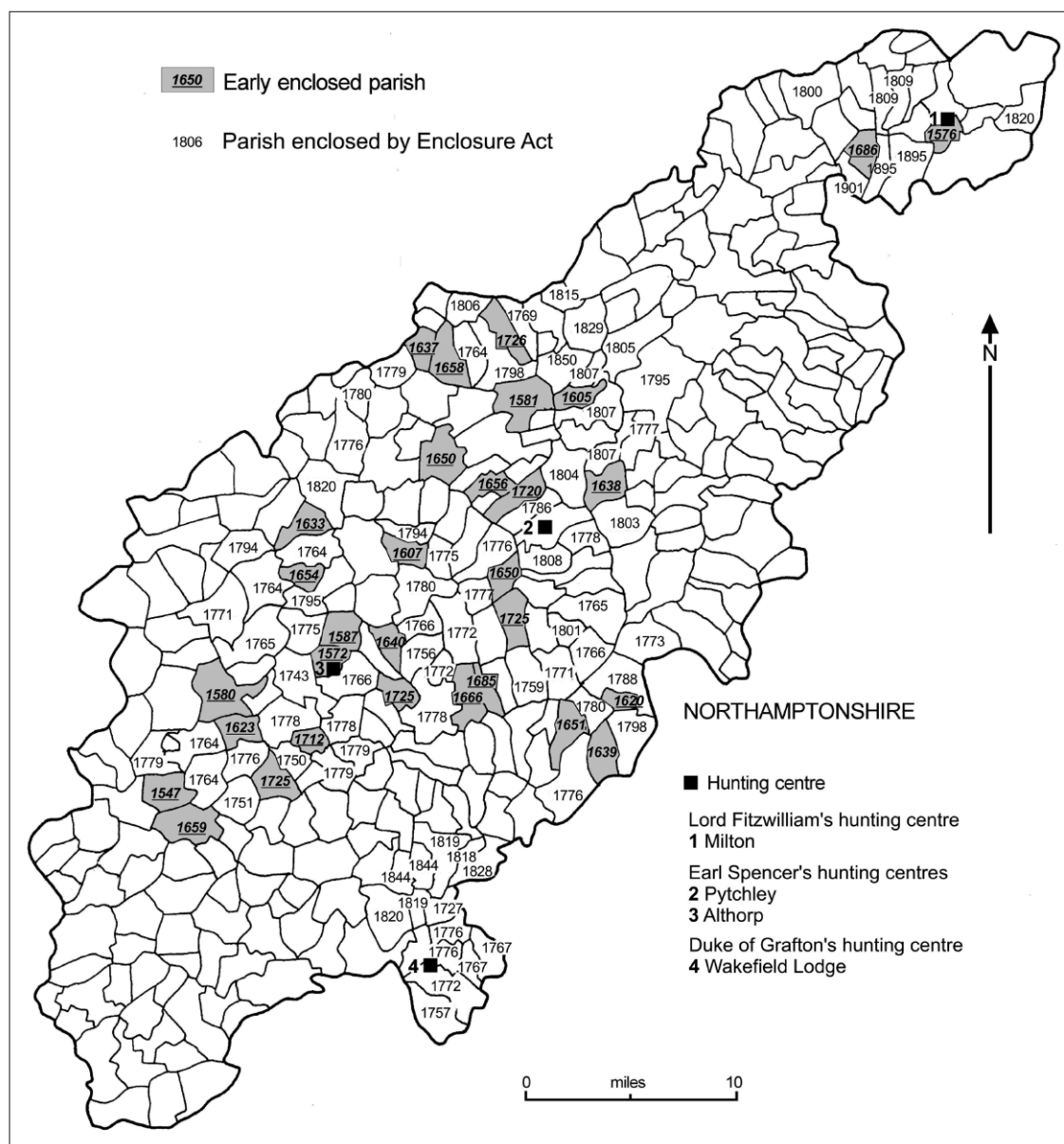


FIGURE 8. Distribution of early foxhunting centres in Northamptonshire, with parish enclosure dates.

Sources: enclosure dates taken from Hall, *Enclosure in Northamptonshire*; hunting centres from Longrigg, *History of foxhunting*; Carr, *English fox hunting*.

that 'a considerable proportion of this county remains unenclosed' and guessed that a quarter of the county remained open, with the bulk of unenclosed land in common fields, and small enclosures generally near villages.⁶⁴ Turning first to the Spencer's two main hunting centres: Althorp and neighbouring Holdenby had already been enclosed in the sixteenth century (due to unity of ownership by the Spencers) and the enclosure of Pytchley was also well advanced by 1662.⁶⁵ Wooton's enormous hunting murals, commissioned in 1733, show vivid evidence that the Spencers had a pack of foxhounds at Althorp by that date. In 1765 Lord Spencer bought forty couple of hounds from Mr Darley of Yorkshire and sent them to kennels adjacent to Pytchley. Paget describes the seasonal movement of the Spencer's pack: the hounds started the season in the Autumn 'cubbing' around Pytchley, returned to Althorp in the beginning of November and remained there until the New Year, when they went back to Pytchley.⁶⁶ Spencer shifted north to Rockingham Forest for spring hunting away from ewes in lamb and spring crops, echoing Meynell's use of Charnwood Forest.⁶⁷

Again a hunting diary provides clear evidence of contemporary attitudes to the landscape. While hounds were at Althorp, a 'Chace' book was kept from 1773 until 1793 which gives a useful insight into the countryside Spencer's pack hunted over. (Enclosure dates from Hall's work have been added.⁶⁸) For example, in October 1773, 'hounds met at Bugbrooke [enclosed in 1779] ... the fox took a circle round the hill and over the open field ... [and after a long hunt] kill'd in a turnip field'. Tellingly, the day is summarized as 'a very pleasing chase having a great display of steady running and excellent hunting but the very strong inclosure at the first setting off prevented parts of the company from viewing the whole of it.'⁶⁹ The 'very strong inclosure' had obviously thwarted many of the mounted followers. By contrast in December of the same year, 1773, the pack was hunting over Harpole field (1778), Kislingbury field (1780), Thorpe field and Heavencot field before crossing into Whittlebury forest during a hunt that lasted three and a half hours, 'a remarkable pleasant chase, being over fine ground with few difficulties'. In January 1775 hounds ran over Clipston field (1776), Marston field and Gumley field (1773) whose recent enclosure forced followers into unaccustomed jumping so 'Mr Sparks had two falls in the chase at leaps ... Mr Payne likewise had a fall at a leap and his horse struck him on the cheek.'⁷⁰ Clearly the Spencers valued an open landscape with 'few difficulties' and followers were frustrated by fences which often led to falls or, at best, delays in following the pack.

The challenges faced by foxhunters after enclosure are well illustrated by part of the enclosure map for Kislingbury, four miles from Althorp, mentioned in the preceding 1773 hunt account (Figure 9). Individual allotments flanking the road range from five acres to nineteen acres apart from the ninety acres allocated for tithe. Any subsequent subdivision of the allotments would further increase the 'difficulties'. The Kislingbury enclosure award of 1780 covered 1741 acres, mainly in open fields, out of a parish total of 2170. By 1801, 630 acres were still under crops: 29 per cent of the total parish area.

⁶⁴ Pitt, *General view ... Leicestershire and Rutland*, p. 56.

⁶⁵ Steane, *Northamptonshire landscape*, p. 228.

⁶⁶ Paget, *Althorp and Pytchley*, p. 43.

⁶⁷ VCH, *Northamptonshire*, II, p. 356.

⁶⁸ Hall, 'Enclosure in Northamptonshire'.

⁶⁹ Paget, *Althorp and Pytchley*, p. 47.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 50.

The new hedges would soon pose a challenge to foxhunters; as Arthur Young observed, ‘bullocks destroy everything with their horns that is not very strong’, suggesting that hedges, which were often known as ‘bullfinches’, and were designed to contain cattle (many destined for the Northampton leather and shoe industries), would be particularly robust.⁷¹

Further confirmation of prominent foxhunters’ attitudes to hunting in an open landscape is provided by examining the Fitzwilliam’s activities in the north-east of Northamptonshire. Milton, since 1502 the home of the Fitzwilliam family and its eponymous pack, is not fringed by any parishes enclosed during the great eighteenth-century rush. Milton itself was enclosed by 1576 but many contiguous parishes such as Helpston, home of John Clare, were not enclosed until the Napoleonic Wars. Strikingly, three parishes south-west of Milton were not enclosed until 1895 (Castor and Ailsworth) and 1901 (Sutton). Much of the area under the Fitzwilliams’ immediate control was left in open fields or sheep-walks – preferable for hunting – until irresistible economic pressures triggered enclosure. Once again a hunting diary, when combined with enclosure information, sheds light on foxhunters’ experience of the landscape. For example, in November 1789, Lord Fitzwilliam’s diary described hunting over both enclosed and unenclosed landscape just east of Oundle, fourteen miles from Milton:⁷²

Threw off at Ashton Wold [1807], found many foxes ... went off at Polbrook corner [1790] to Kingsthorp Coppice [1766] ... then bore back downwind into the Hemmington inclosures [1657] ... then crossed the inclosures and past the patch of furze in the open field, and then again into Ashton Wold ... killed in five minutes.⁷³

Fitzwilliam had chosen to meet in an unenclosed parish [Ashton], which was well stocked with foxes, but was eventually led by the hunted fox into enclosed areas.

The third great landowner’s pack in Northamptonshire provides the most clear-cut evidence of active choice over where to hunt. The third Duke of Grafton was an ardent foxhunter and provides unambiguous evidence about landscape preferences because he had one pack of hounds but two homes with kennels in widely contrasting landscapes. His decisions are explicit because from 1786 until 1791 he kept a detailed hunting diary. Grafton owned a 15,000 acre estate in Northamptonshire, based at Wakefield Lodge on the eastern edge of Whittlewood Forest (Figure 10).⁷⁴

At first glance, Tate and Turner’s work suggests that most of the parishes running in an arc south, west and north of Grafton’s base were only enclosed by act after 1810 although Wicken in the south was enclosed in 1757 and a cluster of four to the east were enclosed from 1767 to 1776.⁷⁵ However, closer reading of the enclosure history of the apparently ‘late enclosed’ parishes suggests a more nuanced picture which is described in Table 5. Although some of the Duke of Grafton’s estate and surrounding land in Northamptonshire remained in open fields until the nineteenth century, much had already been enclosed by agreement; some as early as 1726 in Stoke Bruerne, and 1727 at Grafton Regis.⁷⁶

⁷¹ Steane, *Northamptonshire landscape*, p. 233.

⁷² Again, the parish enclosure dates, from Hall, ‘Enclosure in Northamptonshire’, pp. 359–67, have been added.

⁷³ VCH, *Northamptonshire*, II, p. 373.

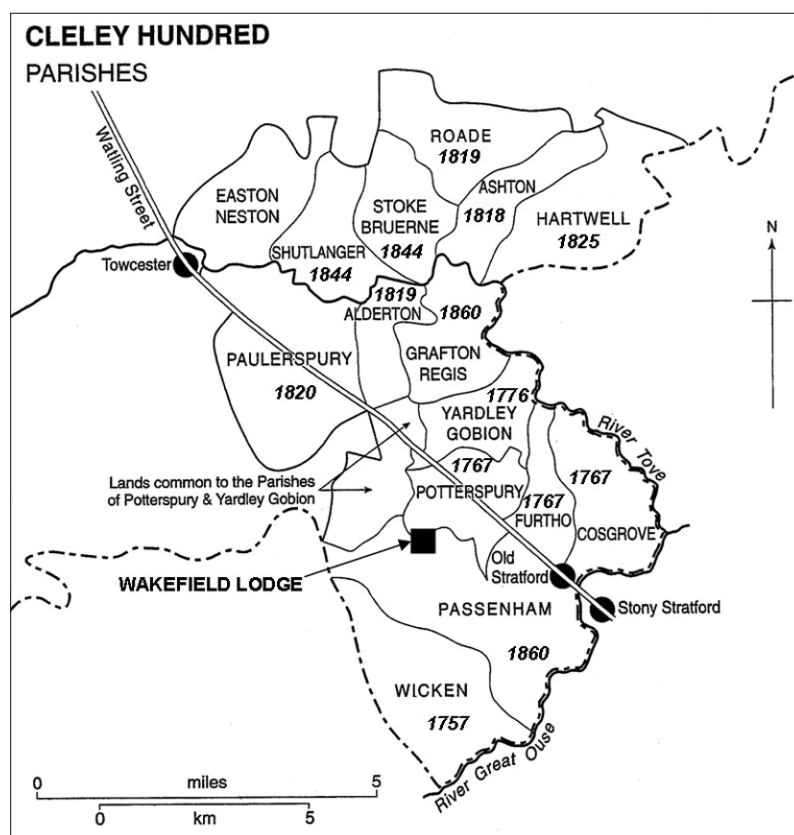
⁷⁴ VCH, *Northamptonshire*, V, p. 28.

⁷⁵ Tate and Turner, *Domesday*.

⁷⁶ VCH, *Northamptonshire*, V.

FIGURE 10. Enclosure dates for parishes around Wakefield Lodge.

Source: base map taken from VCH, *Northamptonshire*, V, p. 5; enclosure dates from Tate and Turner, *Domesday* (1978).



By contrast, his home at Euston in Suffolk was on the eastern fringe of the sandy Breckland, where the vast majority of enclosures of open field and sheep walk by parliamentary act did not take place until after 1790 when the Napoleonic Wars pushed up agricultural prices, justifying the cost.⁷⁷ Figure 11 shows Euston surrounded by late enclosed parishes; enclosure acts were unnecessary because Grafton gradually acquired and engrossed vast swathes of land.⁷⁸ Much of his Suffolk hunt country remained open until 1803 (Grafton was by then 68 and presumably less preoccupied with hunting) when Arthur Young noted that 'the Duke has made very considerable exertions in breaking up sheep-walks in Euston, Fakenham, Bardwell, Sapiston etc'.⁷⁹ It is noticeable that this horseshoe of engrossed parishes around Euston is flanked by parishes where enclosure acts referred to open fields.

So the third Duke had a choice: hunt in the mainly enclosed parishes immediately surrounding his home in Northamptonshire or in the unenclosed open fields, heaths and sheep walks around Euston Hall in north-west Suffolk. Analysis of the Duke's hunting diary for the season 1786–7 gives a very clear verdict: although from 11 September 1786 the Duke

⁷⁷ D. Dymond and E. Martin (eds), *An historical atlas of Suffolk* (1999), p. 104; M. Turner, *English parliamentary enclosure. Its history, geography and economic history* (1980), p. 49.

⁷⁸ Dymond and Martin (eds), *Historical atlas*, p. 105.

⁷⁹ A. Young, *A general view of the agriculture of Suffolk* (sec. edn, 1813), p. 169.

TABLE 5. Enclosure information for parishes flanking Wakefield Lodge.

<i>Parish</i>	<i>Total acreage</i>	<i>Date of enclosure act</i>	<i>Notes</i>
Paulerspury	2961	1819–21	In 1728, the bulk of the estate was divided into 15 farms; 2085 acres were enclosed 1819–21.
Ashton and Roade	2890	1818–19	Some common land in the north-west were enclosed by agreement 1727–68. In Roade, enclosure in 1819 dealt with 1035 acres of open field and 534 acres of old enclosures.
Hartwell	1850	1825	Divided into a number of small farms in the early eighteenth century. 1825 enclosure dealt with remaining 587 acres of open field.
Stoke Bruerne	2569	1844	A 1726 survey showed that the Duke of Grafton owned 835 acres of enclosed land and 720 acres of common field.
Passenham	3250	1860	1772 act for enclosure of 1100 acres. In 1850 Whittlewood was disafforested. 1860 enclosure act for the remaining area.
Grafton Regis	1510	1860	In the early sixteenth century, a large area, c.600 acres, north of the village was enclosed as permanent pasture. In 1727 remaining common field arable and pasture was enclosed by agreement. In 1850 Whittlewood was disafforested 1860 enclosure act for the remaining area.

Source: VCH, *Northamptonshire*, V.

hunted in Northamptonshire, ‘entering’ (training) young hounds, he brought his hounds to Euston on 23 November for the main part of the season, and remained there until 19 February 1787.⁸⁰ The remaining diaries, up until 1791, show that he kept up a similar pattern of movement, favouring open country for the majority of the season but using the forests of Whittlewood and Salcey for ‘cubbing’ to train young hounds in the autumn and for spring hunting away from ewes in lamb, cows in calf, and spring crops. In contrast to west Suffolk’s open landscape, Arthur Young writing of Northamptonshire in 1791 noted that ‘the Duke of Grafton’s considerable farm here is fenced in the utmost perfection. All done with whitethorn hedges, so admirably preserved by posts with double and even treble rails.’⁸¹ Clearly these fences posed considerable barriers and help explain why Grafton only used Northamptonshire for woodland hunting at either end of the season. Figure 11 illustrates the distribution of the Duke’s meets in Suffolk.

Significantly only one meet, at Walsham le Willows, took place in a parish where the parliamentary enclosure act did not include an open field. All the remainder are in parishes enclosed privately after 1800, as at Euston, or by an act which mentioned open fields. It is also noticeable that the only meet at Hinderclay, on the heavier boulder clay to the east where riding conditions

⁸⁰ Suffolk Records Office, Bury St Edmunds (hereafter SRO), Duke of Grafton, HA 513/10/1.

⁸¹ A. Young, *Tours in England and Wales 1791* (sec. edn, 1932), p. 218.

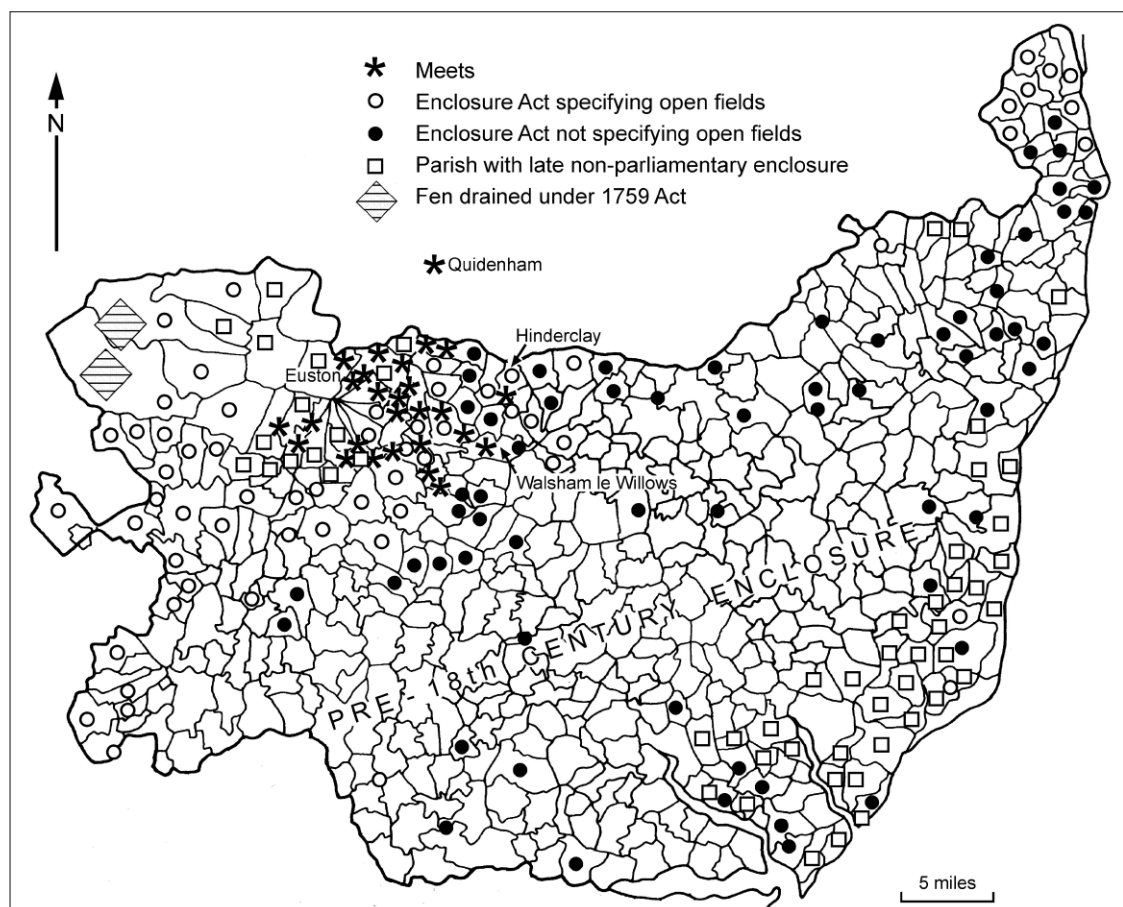


FIGURE 11. The Duke of Grafton's meets for the season 1786-7 and enclosure acts in Suffolk.

Sources: map and enclosure information taken from D. Dymond and E. Martin (eds), *An historical atlas of Suffolk* (1999), p. 105; location of meets for 1786-7 from SRO, Duke of Grafton, HA 513/10/1.

were poorest, took place on 1 December 1786 when the Duke was absent: 'While I was gone to London Jacket [his huntsman] took the hounds to Hinderclay Wood.'

The reason why early foxhunting started predominantly in the 'Champion' rather than the anciently enclosed landscape is well illustrated by examining the Duke of Grafton's preferences in Suffolk. Reyce, writing in 1616, described the pre-enclosure clay land wood pasture of central Suffolk, shown in Figure 11 flanking the Euston estate to the east, as 'deep miry soil ... manifold enclosures, severed with so many deep ditches, hedges and store of wood, bushes and trees'.⁸² The Duke's attitude to hunting this type of enclosed country is made very clear in his hunting diaries for Euston (there are no known Wakefield Lodge records). On 24 January 1787 he described 'the most shocking country that was ever rode over ... fagged from the badness of the country and the perpetual leaps'. In December 1787 he described a fox running into 'a sad

⁸² R. Reyce, *The breviary of Suffolk*, 1618, ed. F. Hervey (sec. edn, 1902).

enclosed country' and a month later another fox took him east into a 'country with which I was not well acquainted' ... 'a horrid inclosed country through Wyverstone ... Gislingham ... Mellis ... Eye', with the result that 'the [hunt] servants and many of the company took a hundred great leaps in this day's work' and his 'gray mare who carried me admirably well had got a bad gash on her knee by some stub at a leap early in the day'.⁸³

By contrast the Duke hunted enthusiastically over open country such as 'Barnham heath and field' (29 November 1786), 'some vast fallows' (11 January 1787), 'on a rye stubble' (13 January 1787), 'over the great commons and fields' (8 February 1787) and 'turnips' (9 January 1790). Another major advantage of the Breckland sheep walks and heaths, described by Arthur Young as 'covered with ling, furze and broom' were the large populations of rabbits, and consequently their predators, foxes.⁸⁴ In the 1786–7 hunting season the Duke often recorded 'four or five' foxes in one place, rising to 'a group', 'six' and even 'as full of them [foxes] as a warren'.

IV

What is the explanation for the preference of many eighteenth-century hunting pioneers for open fields? Examination of diaries and enclosure maps suggest two main reasons. The first is that movement on horseback was easier and safer. At a parish level, access was often relatively simple because a network of tracks and paths crossed the open fields, one third of the system lay in fallow, and another third was probably under stubble for at least part of the hunting season. Within the open fields, grass 'baulks' (narrow strips allowed to grass over and used as common rights of way) provided a network of routes with good 'going' (ground conditions) for horses.⁸⁵ The density of baulks could be significant; for example, there were furlongs with a narrow baulk between every strip at Helmdon and Naseby in Northamptonshire.⁸⁶ Similarly the extensive areas of pasture for tethered or herded stock developed on the fringes of open field systems were easy to cross on horseback. As Finch noted, 'Meynell's dream of "a fast run" may, in fact have been developed in the "cow pastures" of former open-fields which were grassed over prior to formal enclosure in the early nineteenth century'.⁸⁷ The length – up to 20 miles – of foxhunts, however, means it is unlikely that they were confined to pastures; they must also have covered arable land and fallow in the open fields.

A second powerful advantage of an open landscape was the good visibility, summed up by John Clare writing in the Fitzwilliam Hunt country of north-east Northamptonshire:

Unbounded freedom ruled the wandering scene
Nor fence of ownership crept in between
To hide the prospect of the following eye.⁸⁸

The open landscape enhanced foxhunters' enjoyment and provided a clear view of which hounds were hunting best for the 'following eye'. Paget, writing about Northamptonshire,

⁸³ SRO, HA 513/10/1.

⁸⁴ Young, *General view ... Suffolk*, p. 185.

⁸⁵ D. Hall, *Medieval fields* (1982), p. 6.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

⁸⁷ Finch, 'Grass, grass, grass', p. 45.

⁸⁸ J. Bate (ed.), *I am', the selected poetry of John Clare* (2003), p. 89.

explains the significance: 'The huntsman sees the bitches that run hardest and hunt most closely and these he marks down for matrons and seeks for suitable alliances of kindred blood'.⁸⁹ The open landscapes helped the early hound improvers, such as Meynell, select the best blood lines to enhance their packs' endurance, scenting ability and speed. Hawkes, writing soon after Meynell's death, stressed his close observation of the work of individual hounds.⁹⁰ Similarly Grafton's enthusiasm for the open fields, heaths and sheep-walks of Suffolk was mainly due to the absence of fences which allowed him to observe his hounds closely. His diaries are full of affectionate detail: on 29 November 1786 he wrote 'the ground was such that we could see the place of each hound for an hour and thirty-five minutes together. Jumper and Drummer appeared in power equal to any of the older ones'. On 10 February 1787 hunting 'across the middle of Thurston Plain ... and across Barton field ... I saw the fox two fields before the hounds there ... we viewed him into the Link about 200 yards before the hounds'.

Grafton's diaries provide clear evidence that hunting in the open country around Euston became very popular due to the lack of fences with the Duke noting, on 19 February 1787, '120 horsemen in the field and a quantity of foot people starting from every village as we passed'. However the crowds began to irk the Duke, as a rather petulant entry in his diary for 14 January 1791 showed: 'The numbers in the field at first, and the stile of the company was enough to have driven anyone aloof but we soon got rid of two thirds of the gentry'.⁹¹

Careful study of hunting diaries shows a marked antipathy to the enclosed landscape by leading MFHs, particularly as they aged, Meynell did his best to avoid meeting in enclosed areas but inevitably opportunities dwindled as the pace of change quickened with 35.5 per cent of the county area of Leicestershire enclosed between 1760 and 1799.⁹² Turner's work has shown that only 5.5 per cent of Leicestershire's open fields remained to be enclosed in the period between 1793 and 1815.⁹³ So it is unsurprising that, as Figure 6 has shown, a significant amount of Meynell's later hunting was in South Nottinghamshire since 11.3 per cent of that county's open fields still remained unenclosed by 1793. Foxhunters in Northamptonshire and Rutland had more flexibility in avoiding fences because a sizeable area still remained in open field agriculture up until a second surge of enclosure triggered by the Napoleonic wars. Between 1793 and 1815, 12.3 per cent of Northamptonshire's remaining open-field arable was enclosed and 18.8 per cent of Rutland's.⁹⁴

While Meynell and his generation of older MFHs were trying to dodge the inexorable effects of landscape change, from around the 1780s, some younger, fashionable fox hunters began to favour areas where fences added excitement to the day's hunting. A key catalyst for change was William Childe from Kinlet in Shropshire who had started hunting in the early-enclosed Ludlow hunt country where jumping was essential to keep up with hounds. He moved to Leicestershire and started hunting with Meynell in the 1780s, gaining the nickname 'Flying Childe' by jumping fences at speed. It was an unpopular innovation amongst many MFHs. 'Mr Meynell said bitterly that he became accustomed to seeing a fox break covert, followed by Mr Forester and then the hounds', and that 'he had not enjoyed a day's happiness since they had developed their racing

⁸⁹ Paget, *Althorp and Pytchley*, p. 188.

⁹⁰ Quoted in Ellis, *Leicestershire and the Quorn*, p. 15.

⁹¹ SRO, HA 513/10/1.

⁹² Wordie, 'Chronology of English enclosure', p. 498.

⁹³ Turner, *English parliamentary enclosure*, p. 187.

⁹⁴ Ibid.



FIGURE 12. 'Topping a flight of rails' from a series on 'Indispensable accomplishments' by Sir Robert Frankland, illustrating the 'flying leap' in 1811.

Source: Photo courtesy of James Harvey British Art.

ideas'.⁹⁵ Beckford, an MFH in Dorset, wrote in 1781 'sport is but a secondary consideration with a true fox-hunter. The first is the killing of the fox'.⁹⁶ He added loftily, 'To such as love the riding part only of hunting would not a trail-scent be more suitable?'⁹⁷

After the 1780s there must have been a growing split between those traditionalists who continued to hunt with Meynell's hounds, despite or because of his antipathy to jumping, and those who opted for the thrills of galloping and jumping over an increasingly enclosed pastoral landscape with other fashionable packs. Ellis, historian of hunting in Leicestershire, writing of 'the young gentlemen who had come down to Leicestershire for the sole purpose of hunting' acknowledged that 'there were recurrent rumours of better sport to be had with the Duke of Rutland's (Belvoir) or with Sir William Lowther's (Cottesmore) hounds' than with Meynell's pack and he attributes the rise of Melton Mowbrey as a hunting centre to this drift to hunting with packs further east.⁹⁸ Although, as has been shown, much of the hunting by these packs continued to be over open country, Ellis noted the growing impact of the changes in the landscape due to enclosure and the spread of grassland and fences:

all through Meynell's time then, and particularly towards the end of it, Leicestershire was changing. It was changing for reasons that were nothing to do with foxhunting but in ways that were welcomed by foxhunters – particularly by the new kind of foxhunters.⁹⁹

⁹⁵ Longrigg, *History of foxhunting*, p. 72.

⁹⁶ Beckford, *Thoughts*, p. 83.

⁹⁷ An artificial hunt following a drag over a pre-

arranged route; Beckford, *Thoughts*, p. 96.

⁹⁸ Ellis, *Leicestershire and the Quorn*, p. 18.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 29. Meynell was a MFH from 1753 to 1800.

As the Leicestershire Victoria County History summarised, 'Meynell had showed how to hunt this country; the next generation learned how to ride [jump] it'.¹⁰⁰ Figure 12 illustrates the new 'accomplishments' required by 'the next generation' hunting in the first quarter of the nineteenth century.

V

This research challenges the orthodox view held by Hoskins in the 1950s, and repeated regularly over the next half century, that parliamentary enclosure and the subsequent conversion of arable open fields to grassland were triggers for the development of 'modern' foxhunting and its rise in popularity.¹⁰¹ The evidence shows that leading MFHs such as Meynell and Grafton (both born in 1735), as well as Fitzwilliam, Spencer, Rutland and Lowther continued to favour hunting in the dwindling, unenclosed countryside well into the 1790s. As already discussed, the highly respected hunting author Peter Beckford, writing in 1781, advised huntsmen to dismount at once when arriving at a daunting leap. It is clear that many eighteenth-century foxhunters preferred the 'champion' landscape of open fields and sheep courses to the enclosed countryside because they could cross it more easily and safely and see their hounds' performance more clearly, vital in selecting the best breeding lines.

The 1801 Crop Returns show that a significant proportion of the East Midlands was still in arable cultivation at the turn of the century, including parishes on the heavy clay soils. This observation – combined with careful examination of contemporary accounts of poorly drained grassland, often rippled by ridge and furrow and studded with large ant hills – contradicts the traditional view of late eighteenth-century foxhunters gliding smoothly over the pastures of the Midland 'Shires'. The real rise in the importance of the Shires grassland for hunting took place later in the first decades of the nineteenth century after the final surge of enclosure and the spread of artificial drainage. It is significant that the often-quoted description by the fox-hunting author Surtees of the view from a hill in Northamptonshire into 'the heart of Leicestershire' as 'grass, grass, grass ... nothing but grass for miles and miles' was not written until 1834.¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ VCH, *Leicestershire*, III, p. 270.

¹⁰¹ Hoskins, *Making of the English Landscape*, p. 196.

¹⁰² *The New Sporting Magazine*, 1834, quoted in Paget, *Althorp and Pytchley*, p. 144.