

A NOTE ON MEDIEVAL THREE-COURSE ARABLE SYSTEMS IN CHESHIRE

IN my paper on "The Open Fields of Cheshire" (TRANSACTIONS, Vol. 108) it was shown that three-field townships were rare in this county, and that the evidence for there having been a genuine three-field arable system in this part of England was inconclusive.

Recently, owing to the kindness of Mr. F. B. Stitt, B.A., B.Litt., librarian of the William Salt Library, Stafford, my attention has been drawn to unpublished surveys of Wybunbury, Tarvin, and other Cheshire estates of the bishop of Coventry and Lichfield made at the end of the thirteenth century. These are to be found among the ANGLESEY PAPERS, and I am indebted to The Most Hon. the Marquess of Anglesey for his kind permission to reproduce the relevant portions of the surveys of Wybunbury and Tarvin, and to Mr. Stitt for the transcribed copies which follow:

ANGLESEY PAPERS, The William Salt Library, Stafford.
Document No. D 1734/J.2268 f.30d-31

WYBUNBURY, Cheshire

f.30d [] vibbenbury, Extenta huius manerii, in festo Sancti Andree apostuli anno predicto [viz. 26 Ed. I].

Dominicum

1^a sesona

Dominicum huius manerii ita iacet videlicet in vna seisona in campo qui vocatur Vicariesruding' iacent 8½a. 1½r. Item in campo qui vocatur Clauerthyn iacent 5a. ½r. Item in Wallecroft' Orchard et Shepecroft' iacent 6½a. 1r.

2^a seisona

In alia seisona in Hayruding' iacent 2½a. ½r. Item in le Neuweruding' iacent 20½a. 1r. Item in Vicariesruding' iacent 12½a. 1r. Item in cultura que vocatur le Neuweacr' iacent 6½a. Item in Wombetaggeruding' iacent 4a. Item in Wiggehalli(?)z iacent 2½a. 1r. Item in le Dene(s)feld iacent per duas particulas 4a. ½r.

3^a seisona

In le Ruding quod vocatur Jackeacres iacent de Warrecto per particulas 15½a. 1r. Item in Hoggeruding' iacent 4½a. In le Vicariesruding' iacent 9a. ½r. Item in le Denesfeld iacet 1 (a) 1r. de vasto non seminato.

Pratum

In Vicariesruding' iacent 2½a. Item in Alwardusmedewe iacent 3a. 1½r. Item in Emedewe iacent 2a. 1r. Item in Orchardesmedewe iacet ½a. ½r.

Pastura pro [bobus?]

In le Neuweruding' iacent de vasto 17a. 1r. non dum assartate in parte nec de toto frussato. Item in Wombetaggeruding' iacet una acra nou dum frussata. Item le Neuwerk' iacent 6½a. ½r.

Free tenants, 3.

Conventionarii, 8.

Document No. D 1734/J.2268 f.29d-30d.

TARVIN, Cheshire

f.29d Terne, Extenta huius manerii facta . . . die Sabbati proxima post festum Sancti Gregorii anno predicto

Dominicum

1^a seisona

Dominicum huius manerii ita iacet videlicet. In Crouchelakeholm iacent 24½a. ½r. Item in Magna Holm iacent 16½a. Item in Appeltrefeld iacent 10a. Item in Maydenesfeld 23½a. Item in Septem boitus iacent 2a. 1r. Item in Kaienatston iacent 12½a. 1r. Item in Potteresfeld iacent 3½a. ½r. Item in Cowst iacent 9a.

2^a seisona

In alia seisona in Magna Holm iacent 33½a. Item in campo versus Hortone iacent 61a. Item in Mulnefeld iacent 8½a. 1½r. Item in le Broune-heth' iacent 26a. 1½r. Item in M(sic)onigreues iacent 3a. 1r. Item in cultura iacent propinquius gardino ex parte Cestr' 16a. Item in crofto extendente de grang' versus bercar' iacent 3½r.

3^a seisona

In Magna Holm iacent de warrecto warectato 21½a. Item in le Mulnefeld iacent 27½a. ½r.

Pratum

In Magna Holm iacent de prato falcabili 36a. Item in le Mulnefeld et Appeltre iacent 12½a. ½r.

Pastura

In novo campo versus Horton' iacent 5a. non dum fruscate. Item in le Mulnefeld iacent 7a.

f.30 **Vastum**

Iacent inter campos de Owescroft et Smalmore et viam que ducit versus Keleshale et le Syndarhull' et Owescrofteschentes 155a. que possunt assartari et frussari. Item iacent inter Alstanesfeld et Ductum 20a.

Parcus

In parco sunt 215a. que possunt sustenare 50 aueria quorum cuiuslibet pastura valet per annum 4d. Est ibi vna mora in marisco et vocatur Sepeladmore cuius proficium valet per annum 20d.

[The next entries relate to the chace, ?horseponds, mill, and pannage shared by Burton and Farendon].

f.30d Free tenants, 7.

Conventionarii, 13.

Natiui, 8.

Cotarii, 5.

Censarii, 7.

From these surveys it is clear that in the case of the two nucleated parochial villages of Wybunbury and Tarvin, a three-course system of arable farming was followed, but in numerous fields. In Wybunbury, twelve separate places are named in which ploughing strips were to be found *circa* 1297, but of these only one (Denesfeld) was called a *field*, the rest being known as *riddings*, *crofts*, *acres*, etc. In the three-year arable course practised there, some part of Vicariesruding (or Vicar's

Ridding) was used every year, and other parts of it were set aside for a hay crop. In addition three other common meadows provided the hay so essential for winter feed, and no doubt lay by the brookside. The name *ridding* is applied characteristically to additionally cleared land and the recency of their reclamation is evident in the case of Neuwruding where 17a.1r. was still only available as rough pasture, and in that of Wombetaggeruding where an acre was similarly listed.

In Tarvin, fourteen separate arable areas are referred to, but four of these are called fields, suggesting their older establishment. As in Wybunbury, one area of tillage (Magna Holm) was used in part in each of the three years of the course, but in Tarvin there were no riddings, and only one (unnamed) croft. There was some cultivated land on Brouneheth, probably in the nature of an outfield, and the increasing acreage of cultivated land is shown by the reference to a new field near Horton of which parts were still uncultivated but in service as pasture. The active extension of the farmland is also evidenced by the entry referring to waste of which 155 acres was deemed capable of being assarted for cultivation. The arable was the main productive area; there were no common meadows in Tarvin, hay being harvested from portions of the arable fields.

Unfortunately, the cartographical evidence is much later. The first known field map in the case of Wybunbury is the tithe map of 1845 (TRANSACTIONS, Vol. 108, p. 8). Not one of the field names enumerated in the Anglesey survey is traceable by name on the nineteenth-century plan which provides evidence that the open arable had long been reduced to a single Town Field (TRANSACTIONS, Vol. 101, pp. 17-19). Looked at again in the light of the Anglesey survey, it is still impossible to trace all the areas which were involved in this complex three-course arable system in its multi-field setting, but new significance is given to the several strip-shaped fields which lay to the south and west of the village in 1845, and it is a fairly safe assumption that in the thirteenth century common tillage was practised over a wide section of the township excluding the brookside belt of common meadowland, and the area of former waste in the northern part—though even this latter may, on the Tarvin pattern, have provided occasional outfield.

It would be unwise to suggest that these two cases were typical. In the first place, both are nucleated parochial villages surrounded, as is characteristic of the Cheshire settlement system, by dependent townships with minor settlements and small populations. Secondly, both were church lands, and there

is more ample evidence to suggest that the church was actively extending the colonised area in medieval Cheshire than were other agents. But, in view of the available contemporary documents, it does at least seem justifiable to suppose that in other townships with irregular arable areas, a tidying-up process was achieved by working them under a two- or three-course system as was suggested in 1956 (TRANSACTIONS, Vol. 108, pp. 20-26).

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