

ART. IV.—*Eighteenth Century Agriculture in Cumbria.*

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AGRICULTURAL development in Cumbria was retarded in comparison with the more southerly parts of the realm, due, no doubt, to the position and the nature of the physical background. It followed therefore, that whilst the seventeenth century was of outstanding importance in English agriculture, it was in the eighteenth century that there were the beginnings of agricultural developments in North West England.

The 17th century was important in English Agriculture because it saw the introduction of the two important field crops, turnips and clover. Viscount Townshend ("Turnip Townshend") had however been dead for seventeen years when Philip Howard of Corby Castle introduced turnips into Cumberland in 1755.\* Three years previous to this Howard had a field sown with clover and showed his countrymen the value of 'artificial' grasses.

Although these two field crops, turnips and clover, had been introduced into English agriculture as early as 1645, Philip Howard still deserves credit for bringing them to the north-west, for the results which followed at a later date were of the utmost importance. The available area for crops was increased by doing away with the necessity for fallow on all but the heaviest lands. More important still however, was the fact that winter food was provided for cattle and this was followed by the growth of the livestock industry, both sheep and cattle, the latter from store raising to the production of finished beef. Previously, during the autumn the majority of the oxen, sheep and pigs were slaughtered except a few for breeding purposes. The flesh was cut into 'collops' and preserved in tubs of brine, or salted and hung or potted and covered over with lard (hence the term larder). 'Collop Monday',

\* Wheat also was probably first cultivated in Cumberland about this time.

signified the date by which all such provisions were supposed to be finished, before the commencement of the lenten fast.

The resulting growth of the livestock industry was in evidence when Arthur Young made his carefully minuted tour in 1770, and despite the fact that his journey through Cumberland and Westmorland took him amongst some of the most barren land in the Kingdom.\* Some of the facts recorded by him, for farms he visited, are given in the subjoined table. The relative importance of cows is clearly marked, and he indicated, amongst other things, that their winter food was straw or hay, a ton and a half being the usual quantity for one cow. Where the recent developments had been adopted however and clover hay was being used, then one ton was reckoned enough.

TABLE OF CUMBRIAN FARMS WITH PARTICULARS OBTAINED BY ARTHUR YOUNG WHEN HE TOURED ENGLAND IN 1770.

A.	Farm No.	Acres	Grass	Arable	Wheat	Barley	Oats	Peas	Turnips	Clover
Ascot	1	100	40	60	15	—	15	15		
	2	140	54	86	22	—	22	22		
	3	125	70	55	16	—	16	16		
	4	80	40	40	10	—	10	10		
	5	50	30	20	5	—	5	5		
Penrith	1	2000	2000							
	2	100	60	40	8	8	8	—	8	8
	3	240	120	120	24	24	24		24	24
	4	80	60	20	4	4	4		4	4
Keswick	1	100	10	90	18	18	36			
	2	220	100	120	24	24	48			
	3	130	80	50	10	10	20			
	4	70	50	20	4	4	8			
Shapp	1	200	200							
	2	100	85	15		4	12			
	3	120	100	20		5	15			
	4	70	65	5						
	5	50	50							
Holme	1	55	5	50	3					
	2	70	20	50	12	12	12			
	3	35	5	30	7	7	7			
	4	46	8	38	9	9	9			

Average of 250 farms visited in England and Wales:—

287 148 149 27½ 26 20½ 11½ 14 6½

\* *A Six Months Tour Through the North of England*, Vol. iii, letter xvii, pp. 116-188. 1770 London.

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B.

	Horses	Cows	Fat Cattle	Young Cattle	Sheep	Men	Maids	Boys	Lab-ourers†	Rent
Ascot*	4	6	1	10	80	1	1	1	—	£70
	7	12	2	22	30	1	1	2	1	95
	4	9	2	26	50	1	1	1	1	70
	—	5	1	13	30	1	1	1	—	70
	—	3	1	2	20	—	—	1	—	35
Penrith	5	20	—	40	2000	1	2	1	4	200
	6	10	4	24	100	1	1	1	1	75
	8	12	8	20	200	1	2	1	2	100
Keswick	3	4	—	10	—	—	1	1	—	55
	8	10	4	20	400	1	1	1	1	50
	12	22	5	30	400	1	2	2	2	80
	6	12	—	18	200	1	1	1	—	95
Shapp	4	8	2	—	200	—	1	1	—	50
	2	10	60	20	700	2	1	—	—	140
	2	20	15	15	200	1	1	—	—	100
	3	13	8	10	500	1	1	1	—	75
	2	10	2	8	200	—	1	1	—	63
Holme	1	8	6	10	80	—	—	1	—	40
	4	10	2	4	—	—	—	1	1	56
	5	12	2	6	30	1	1	1	1	65
	4	4	—	6	—	—	1	1	—	35
	4	6	—	4	20	1	—	—	—	40
Average of 250 farms visited in England and Wales:—										
	10½	12	9	20	260	2	1½	1	3	£142 12 6

This Table is from Vol. IV, *A Six Months Tour Through the North of England*, 1770.

By this time the Penrith district was apparently the most noteworthy in Cumbria. The soil said Young "is of divers sorts, clay, sand, gravel, loam and black moory earth. . . Farms rise from £10 a year, so high as £700 but in general from £80 to £150. Their courses are: 1 Turnips, 2 Barley, 3 Clover, 4 Wheat, 5 Oats. Another: 1 Oats on the grass broke up, 2 Barley, 3 Oats, 4 Oats, 5 Peas. This is capital indeed! but very common; for much land, even within two or three miles of Penrith hath been sown every year with either barley, oats or peas, for these seventy years."

\* The modern High Hesket, nine miles south of Carlisle.

† In 1796 Cumberland Labourers were paid 10d. to 1/- a day with food, or 1/6 to 1/8 without food. *Vide History of Agriculture*, W. R. H. Curtler.

In other parts, as the table clearly shows, and as Young mentioned in the account of his journeys, the farmers "know but little of clover" and "cultivate some few turnips." About Shap, he said "the soil is generally a loam in some places thin, but in others deep." "Their course: 1 Break up, and sow oats, 2 Oats, 3 Barley, 4 Oats and then down again. This is execrable." One feature which surprised Young more than once was the small number of pigs, "They have no notion of keeping hogs in consequence of cows, a dairy of twenty not maintaining above one or two . . . A farmer without a dairy has as many as those who keep the largest, which would surprize a Suffolk or an Essex man." Of fallowing he said it "is a new fashion and not perfectly relished by the farmers yet."

When leaving the district he travelled from Kendal to Burton "passing through a country various in respect of culture." About Holme he noticed that the soil was a light loam on a limestone and "as to their courses they did not use to fallow at all, but now they are: 1 Fallow, 2 Wheat, 3 Barley, 4 Oats and then let it lie to graze itself and 1 Fallow, 2 Wheat, 3 Barley, 4 Clover, 5 Wheat, 6 Oats, 7 Barley, 8 Oats, and then lye as before;" and we take leave of Arthur Young as he remarks "for this these slovens deserve to be hanged."

Although it can now be realised that the work of Philip Howard marked the beginning of the end of purely 'subsistence agriculture' and as Arthur Young's journey showed, contributed much to the traditional Cumbrian stock farming, yet his contemporaries were not quick to follow his lead. Even twenty-five years later, about 1795, when Bailey and Culley surveyed Cumberland for the Board of Agriculture\* they only saw "various patches of turnips . . . at Netherby, Burgh, Dalston, and a few

\* Established in 1793 with Sir John Sinclair as President and Arthur Young as Secretary.

other places.”\* Pringle who had visited Westmorland in the latter part of 1793 mentioned that amongst the crops not commonly cultivated were peas, beans, clover, and rye grass.† Turnips were quite a curiosity and people would travel miles to see a crop of an acre or two, some pronouncing them a new-fangled and useless fancy. Cabbage and carrots were not common and flax and hemp formerly grown by almost every statesman were no longer important.”‡

About the end of the 18th century however, potatoes were cultivated “by almost every farmer, not only for the use of their own families, but for sale, where the situation is not too distant from a good market.”\*§ The small farmers used a meal made from potatoes and corn to fatten pigs, and on some of the larger estates they were in addition also applied to feeding cattle. They were cultivated in various ways, but chiefly by the plough, horses being yoked double, oxen not finding favour in Cumbria as they had done 70 or 80 years previous. Around Kendal it was the practice of some farmers to manure the land with dung, plough it once, and then let it in this state at two shillings a perch “to the manufacturers and labourers . . . who furnish the plants and the rest of the labour.”†

Of the cereals, oats and barley were most important and provided the bread of the inhabitants. There is evidence however that quantities of these were also imported.|| A return for Whitehaven shows that in 1796 the imports included 7,277 qrs., 3 bushels of Oats and 8 bolls 100 lbs. of Oatmeal; together with 81 qrs. of

\* *General View of the Agriculture of the county of Cumberland.*

† *General View of the Agriculture of the county of Westmorland.*

‡ The Tithe schedules indicated this by field names such as “Hempland” and “Hempland Dale.”

§ This continued until the potato disease visited England—this was worse in West Cumberland than in the East.

|| Tables VIII and IX p. 372 *General Report of Enclosures*, 1808.

Barley; 205 qrs., 3 bushels of Rye; 17 qrs., 4 bushels of Wheat and 9 cwts. 3 qrs. 16 lbs. of wheat flour. Later, in 1800 between January 4th and October 10th, 1,101 bolls of Oatmeal and 2,160 cwts., of wheat flour entered the same port.\*

“Wheat is a modern production here” wrote Bailey and Culley, “we were informed that it is not more than 40 years since summer fallows . . . were first used.” By the end of the eighteenth century however it was recorded by these same observers that wheat was important in the neighbourhood of Ravenglass, as well as all along the coast to Scotland and in the neighbourhood of Carlisle. In Westmorland, Pringle indicated that in the south “it is not quite so rare to see a few acres of wheat.”

The most prevalent system seemed to have been that when a field was ploughed out from grass they had oats-oats-barley-oats, or oats-barley-oats-oats for nine or twelve years. A few farmers sowed hay-seeds and a little white clover, but the greater number merely left it to nature for they were as slow to follow Philip Howard in his introduction of artificial grasses as with turnips.

About this time the cattle were “a small breed of long horns, with a few exceptions of the Galloway breed intermixed, particularly along the coast from Whitehaven to Carlisle.” This breed was not distinguished by any peculiar good qualities as there was no one paying any attention to its improvement. Bailey and Culley mention that a certain Mr. Hazle of Dalemain had made some progress in the improvement of the breed but his work was not carried on by his successors.

Dairy farming was important in both counties, and of Westmorland, Pringle stated “there are few counties in England . . . where more milch cows are kept in proportion to its size, and where the produce of the dairy

\* The term ‘boll’ used chiefly in Scotland and the North of England, as a measure of weight for flour, 140 lbs., as capacity for grain 16 pecks, 1 boll.

forms a greater part of the profits of the farmer." The dairies were small and were chiefly engaged in making butter "of an excellent quality" which was sold in local markets, also in London, firkins of 56 lbs. net., fetching 30s. to 35s.\* Milk was contracted for at 1½d. a quart and the general average of production appeared to be "seven or eight quarts of milk at a meal and from three to five pounds of butter per week, through the summer. "Skimmed milk cheese" was chiefly for local use.

The sheep appear to have been mainly Herdwicks, Black-faced, and the Silverdale breed. Wool was sold at 5d. to 5½d. per pound in 1793 with the exception of that from the Silverdales which was worth 8d. per pound. In Westmorland, part of the wool was sold to the manufacturers of Kendal and part to those at Bradford and other woollen centres in the West Riding.

It is interesting to notice how one of the recommendations made by Bailey and Culley has come into being. They said, "for the lower districts, a breed of improved long-woolled sheep . . . would undoubtedly be far more profitable than those that are now bred . . . and from the great portion of excellent turnip soil distributed through every part of the county, almost every breeder would be enabled to fatten his own." Pringle also stressed the need for improvement in the management of sheep but added that this was not possible until there was some material change with regard to the extensive commons which were then a conspicuous feature in Cumbria.

The extent of the commons can be realized from the fact that in 1793 three-quarters of Westmorland (acreage returned as 540,160) was thought to consist of uncultivated land, only 135,000 acres being under cultivation, with 20,000 acres of this for corn and the remainder for hay. In Cumberland it appears from the following

\* In Cumberland "the article of butter is said to amount to £30,000 per annum, the whole chiefly for the London market." P. 224, Bailey and Culley.

figures (after Bailey and Culley) that about one half was unenclosed.

The mountainous districts contained	342,000 acres
The improvable common	150,000
Old inclosures	470,000
Lakes and waters	8,000
	970,000 acres

The accuracy of these calculations is evident when the statistics for 140 years later (1935) are examined, 341,047 acres being returned as rough grazing and the total area as 973,095 acres.

According to the Commons Inclosure Awards the earliest awards appear to date from the mid-eighteenth century.\* In 1763 Skelton Common Field was inclosed and also Rockcliffe and Westlinton common. Two years later the first inclosure in Westmorland appears to have been that of Colby Pasture. The General Report on Enclosures drawn up by order of the Board of Agriculture and published in 1808 indicated that the Waste Lands enclosed by Acts of Parliament passed in the first forty years of the reign of George III (i.e. 1760-1800) comprised the following:—

TABLE SHOWING

WASTE LANDS ENCLOSED BY ACTS PASSED IN THE FIRST 40 YEARS OF GEORGE III (i.e. 1760-1800).

Cumberland 39,515 acres

(Acts 20 passed)	Acres		Acres
Moresby	1060	Bassenthwaite	1810
Stapleton	552	Greystoke	654
C. Sowerby	4500	Culgarth	1600
Sebergham	2896	Carlisle	1800
Skelton	5000	Bolton	5178
Farlam	2300	Brampton	2000
Irthington	3679	Millfield	3600
Upper and Nether Denton	2886		

\* A Return of Commons (Inclosure Awards) to the House of Commons, 1904.

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Westmorland 10,383 acres

(Acts 13 passed)	Acres		Acres
Orton	5500	Warcop	980
Long Marton	800	do.	820
Ormside	885	Appleby	226
Kirkby Thore	362	Morland	410
		Morland Township	400

Concerning the earlier inclosures, Marshall said "It is remarkable that the worst soiled commons . . . have been first appropriated. Perhaps their being unsafe for sheep induced the customary tenants to give them up the more readily."\*

Whilst the observers in the North Western Counties lamented the extensive tracts of land lying waste of little value to the owners, and of small benefit to the community, they realised that any advantages arising from inclosure must entirely depend upon the modes of management pursued after such inclosing had taken place. They pointed out that during the thirty years or so in which some commons had been enclosed, especially around Brampton and south of Carlisle, some land had, aided by the stimulating effects of lime, been used to produce nine or ten successive crops of corn and was then exhausted.

The advantages to stock, arising from the inclosing of commons is perhaps most marked. At the end of the eighteenth century the commons appear to have been overstocked. It was generally understood that no person should send to any common more stock than he could winter upon his own estate or farm but said the observers "every one turns on what he pleases; and there is generally double the quantity of stock there ought to be." It was pointed out that an enlightened breeder could do little to improve his stock so long as flocks mixed promiscuously. Furthermore, infectious disorders were difficult to combat. It was computed that one third of all the sheep in Westmorland died in the year 1792.

\* *An Abstract of the County Reports to the Board of Agriculture. Comprising those from the Northern Dept.*, p. 159, W. Marshall, York, 1833.

A general inclosure bill for the whole kingdom was suggested.\* At that time separate applications had to be made to Parliament for the division of particular commons and this could be an expensive business especially if "two or three, or possibly only one, ignorant or ill-natured person or persons, are absurd enough to oppose it." (Bailey and Culley).†

Such, in brief, was the state of affairs in Cumbria at the end of the eighteenth century when Messrs. Bailey, Culley and Pringle obtained "a general view of the agriculture" and reported to the Board of Agriculture. They indicated in their reports that farmers were beginning to take notice of improved methods, and foremost amongst those who furthered these methods was John Christian (1756-1828) better known as John Christian Curwen, the name he assumed on his second marriage in 1790 when he became a great landed proprietor. He took such an active interest in the land that he carried "a name second to none in agriculture in Britain" and can indeed be regarded as "the father of Cumbrian farming" or the leader of 'improving landlords' in the North West.

"To record what he did, and attempted to do, as an experimental farmer, single-handed, during the long years that his mind was devoted to farming, would be to fill an ordinary-sized volume, and such a volume could only embrace a slight epitome of his work."‡ Having travelled widely at home and abroad he brought to bear upon Cumbrian agriculture an enlarged and enlightened experience and outlook which had hitherto been lacking.

At the outset, it may be said that he brought all kinds of stock to his farms at Workington Hall, not always successfully. It was through his activities however that

\* This came in 1801 as the Enclosure Consolidating Act.

† Average amount £497 for the Act, £259 for the Survey, £344 for the Commissioners, £550 7s. 6d. for fencing, etc.

‡ P. 83, *The Worthies of Cumberland*—John Christian Curwen, Henry Lonsdale, 1867, London.

the short-horn cattle were introduced and became amongst the finest stock in the county; and some of the best stock in the U.S.A., had their pedigree in animals of his rearing. He was not averse to paying large sums such as 1,000 guineas for a bull, although we generally assume that 'fancy prices' belong to a later period. It is said that he imported a flock of merinos but the experiment was unfavourable.

Mr. Curwen expended large sums in the inclosure, fencing and draining of poor land. He had erected a bone-mill and proved the fertilizing value of crushed bones. He tried all kinds of manure, the paring and burning of bad-surfaced land, lime, "and every plausible compost or agency that the theory of chemistry, or the reasoning of practical men, could suggest."

As he resided for a part of each year at Belle Isle his Windermere home, he was able to assist the Kendal Agricultural Society. This had been established in 1799 but in the first three decades of the following century it was temporarily eclipsed by the society formed by Curwen at Workington.

It will be clear from the facts presented, that agriculture in Cumbria, owed much to Philip Howard and John Christian Curwen and that their work was fundamental to the development of farming which followed the gradual enclosing of the numerous commons and waste lands. The perception of these men can be realised only when we remember that the features they established one hundred and fifty years ago provide the basis of our present day agriculture.