

AN ANALYSIS OF THE 1795 CROP RETURNS FOR THE HUNDRED OF SCARSDALE

By DUDLEY FOWKES

Few general sources are available for the systematic study of agriculture in the eighteenth century particularly the important aspects of land use and cropping. One of the few such sources is the 1795 crop returns which resulted from the increasing concern regarding grain production in England in the early 1790s with a series of poor harvests set against a backcloth of a rapidly increasing population.

The 1795 enquiry, initiated by the Duke of Portland, was the first of several attempts to acquire statistical information on the state of agriculture in the closing decades of the century. The demand for such information, in part prompted by the writings of Arthur Young, William Marshall and their local counterparts, had existed for some time but it was the poor harvests of the early 1790s that finally precipitated action. The threat of naval blockades during the Napoleonic Wars increased the anxiety later in the decade and resulted in the better known and more complete '1801 returns'.

The Duke of Portland entrusted the 1795 enquiry to the Justices of the Peace who in turn instructed the local constable or headborough of each constablewick to collect the statistics from the individual farmers and make the return. Clearly this task was not universally well received and there was ample scope for inaccuracies although in this particular case study there is no reason to suspect the basic pattern of cropping that emerges. Within Derbyshire the returns survive only for most of the hundred of Scarsdale¹: the fate of those for the other hundreds is not known.

Unfortunately, the 1795 enquiry was concerned only with the acreage in the principal grain crops — wheat, barley, oats, rye, peas and beans — so it does not provide data on the extent to which fodder and root crops may have been introduced into the area by this date or the continuing employment of the bare fallow in the rotation. A pro forma appears to have been supplied to each constablewick — but not necessarily used. In addition to being asked the simple acreage in each of the six crops, the constable or headborough was also asked to supply information on the yields relative to the 'average crop' and to 1794 in particular. Less guidance was given as to how this question should be answered and the somewhat subjective replies are consequently more difficult to analyse.

THE ANALYSIS

An analysis of the individual returns is summarised in Table 1 and a summary of the total acreage recorded in each crop is given in Table 2.

Whichever method is used to demonstrate the basic cropping pattern, the overwhelming dominance of oats and wheat throughout the area is apparent as Tables 1 and 2 indicate. The position of oats as the leading whitecorn crop is not surprising given the proportion of the area occupied by coal measures clays and the gritstones of the moorlands edge (see Fig. 1).

The frequency distribution table nevertheless indicates that wheat was the most consistently

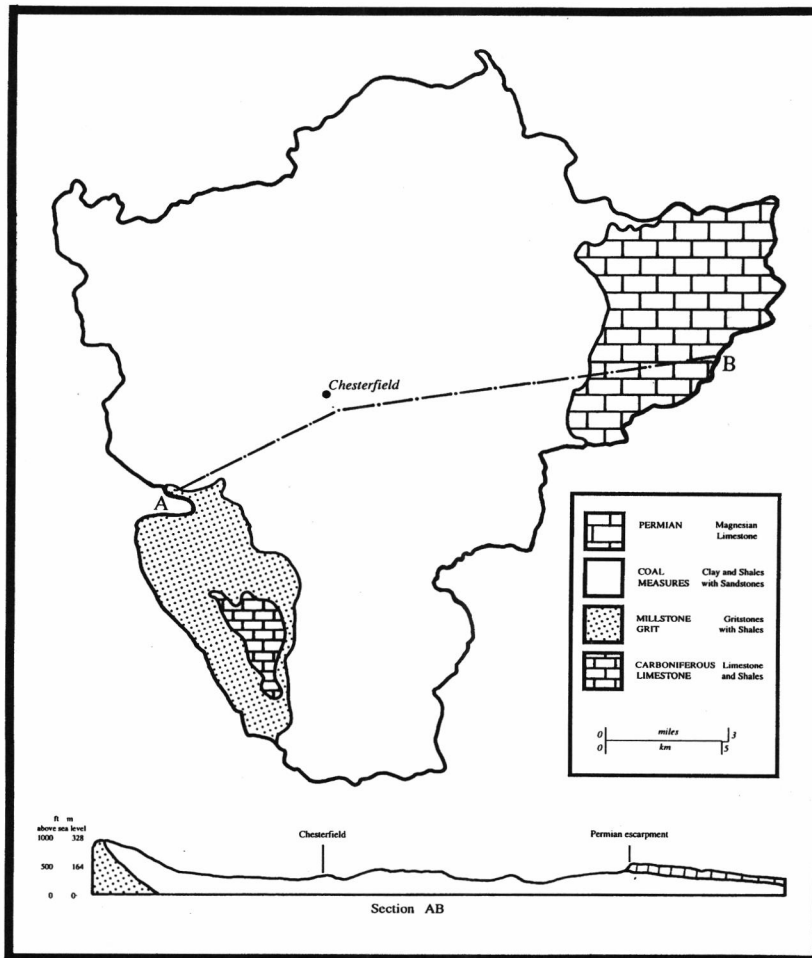


Fig 1 Geology of Scarsdale Hundred

cultivated crop across the area as a whole, irrespective of soil type, with 41 out of 45 constablewicks having between 30 and 50 per cent of their recorded cropped acreage in wheat. Barley was a very poor third in the area as a whole as it was considered a light soil crop and was rarely cultivated in large quantities on the clays. Of the traditional fodder crops, beans was very under-represented as the traditional third crop in the wheat-beans-fallow rotation of the clays. Peas was more generally favoured throughout the area. The continued cultivation of 12 acres of rye at Ashover is worth recording as very much an anachronism by this date.

Fig.2 demonstrates the variations within the area within the context of this basic pattern. The greater relative importance of barley on the lighter soils of the magnesian limestone is very apparent as is the greater relative importance of oats on the moorland fringes and of wheat in the coal measures clays. There are no obvious anomalies in a very predictable pattern.

As stated earlier, a systematic study of the yields in the two years is difficult because of the lack of consistency in the way these were recorded but it is nevertheless apparent that for all crops

Constablewick	% wheat	% oats	% barley	% peas	% beans
Alfreton	44.8	48.3	5.6	1.3	—
Ashover*	25.0	71.1	2.1	—	0.9
Barlborough	45.5	41.9	8.4	4.2	—
Great Barlow	32.7	48.4	11.1	7.8	—
Beauchief	26.3	51.3	22.4	—	—
Beighton	35.8	21.7	11.4	5.7	25.4
Blackwell	35.7	45.2	19.1	—	—
Bolsover	41.8	41.9	12.9	3.4	—
Brackenfield	40.6	51.7	5.8	1.9	—
Brampton	40.1	54.3	1.8	3.8	—
Brimington	46.7	39.7	5.1	8.5	—
Calow	44.2	50.8	3.1	1.9	—
Clowne	48.2	40.6	6.6	4.6	—
Coal Aston	43.9	36.1	13.9	6.1	—
Dore and Totley	32.9	59.9	3.6	3.6	—
Dronfield	39.2	39.4	15.6	5.8	—
Eckington	47.0	36.6	10.0	6.4	—
Elmton	35.1	27.6	27.4	9.9	—
Glapwell	32.9	40.1	22.7	3.7	0.6
Hasland	42.5	53.5	2.7	1.3	—
Heath	42.3	47.2	9.4	1.1	—
Holmesfield	34.4	56.8	2.5	6.3	—
Killamarsh	36.4	43.5	10.9	5.9	3.3
Morton	31.3	57.0	11.7	—	—
Newbold and Dunston	46.7	40.2	8.7	4.2	0.2
South Normanton	34.0	52.6	12.1	1.3	—
Temple Normanton	38.6	57.9	—	3.5	—
Norton	41.3	44.6	7.9	6.2	—
Pilsley	16.5	74.3	9.2	—	—
Pleasley	38.6	22.4	30.8	8.2	—
Pinxton	44.0	48.8	7.2	—	—
Scarcliffe	33.0	32.4	16.1	18.5	—
Shirland	33.7	51.4	14.9	—	—
Stainsby	32.9	44.5	11.6	11.0	—
Staveley	42.6	44.5	8.5	4.4	—
Stretton	33.6	54.8	8.6	3.0	—
Sutton	46.3	50.6	2.2	0.9	—
Tapton	35.0	51.7	10.0	3.3	—
Tibshelf	34.1	46.4	18.5	1.0	—
Unstone	46.2	46.2	3.8	3.8	—
Walton	46.1	46.1	3.9	3.9	—
Whittington	45.8	39.5	7.7	2.4	4.6
Whitwell	42.6	30.5	19.4	7.3	0.2
North Wingfield	21.8	38.0	39.7	0.5	—
South Wingfield	39.0	47.5	11.6	1.9	—
Average	38.0	46.0	11.2	4.0	0.8

* also 12 acres of rye were recorded at Ashover

Table 1 Summary of cropping 1795

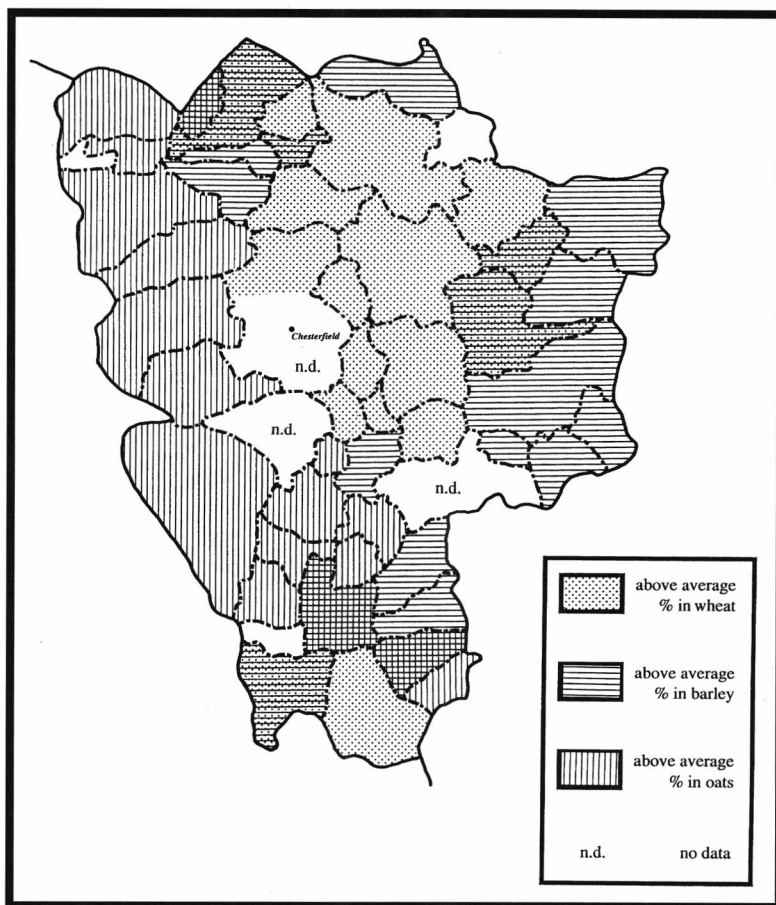


Fig 2 Scarsdale Hundred 1795 — distribution of crops

except wheat yields in 1795 were good relative to 1794 (see Table 4). It is also apparent that yields per acre were poorer on the magnesian limestone than on the heavier soils but this would have been offset to a degree by the greater ease of working.

	Acres	Percentage
Oats	11727	44.23
Wheat	10122	38.18
Barley	3093	11.67
Peas	1321	4.98
Beans	235	0.89
Rye	12	0.05
Total	26510	

Table 2 Aggregated acreages in each of the grain crops

	<20%	20-29.9%	30-30.9%	40-40.9%	50-59.9%	>60%
Wheat	1	3	20	21	—	—
Oats	—	3	8	18	14	2
Barley	40	3	2	—	—	—
Peas	45	—	—	—	—	—
Beans	45	—	—	—	—	—

Table 3 Frequency distribution of proportions of recorded cropped acreages occupied by each of the grain crops

	>1794	<1794	as 1794	no return
Wheat	5	22	6	12
Oats	36	2	3	4
Barley	35	1	2	7
Peas	32	0	2	11

Table 4 Comparison of yields per acre 1794 and 1795

CONCLUSION

For data on cropping in the eighteenth century, one has normally to depend on sporadically occurring estate and tithe material. This sole example of the 1795 crop returns in Derbyshire provides a rare instance of almost blanket information over a complete area albeit restricted to the traditional white grain crops. Analysis of the data brings up no real surprises but confirms the basic pattern of cropping on the coalfield and its environs and highlights the different characteristics of arable farming on the lighter soils. The information on yields reveals that in this part of Derbyshire at least, 1795 was a relatively poor year for wheat but a good one for the other grain crops.

REFERENCE

1. Derbyshire Record Office, Quarter Sessions records. There are no returns for the ancient parishes of Ault Hucknall and Wingerworth and the borough of Chesterfield

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Court, W. H. B., *A concise economic history of Britain from 1750 to recent times*, (Cambridge University Press, 1964)
- Minchinton, W. E., 'Agricultural returns and the government during the Napoleonic Wars', *Agricultural History Review* Vol 1 (1953).

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I am grateful to Keith Reedman for drawing the maps.

Editorial Note

Grant Aid

We are pleased to acknowledge a grant of £400 from the Council for British Archaeology towards the publication of the report on the Cavendish Vault at Derby Cathedral in Vol 114 for 1994.