

MERCHANT'S AND HAYLEIGH FARMS IN STREAT AND
WESTMESTON (EAST SUSSEX);
THE DEVELOPMENT OF TWO FARMS ON THE WEALD CLAY
c. 1500–1980

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The histories of Marchant's and Hayleigh Farms illustrate the development of farms on the southern bounds of the Weald clay. They are examples of the two most common types of tenure. Hayleigh, a freehold farm, was at first part of the demesne (the lord's share) of the Manor of Middleton. Marchant's was predominantly copyhold held of the Manor of Streat. This study suggests that the major influences upon their development were agricultural practices within the region rather than their different tenures.

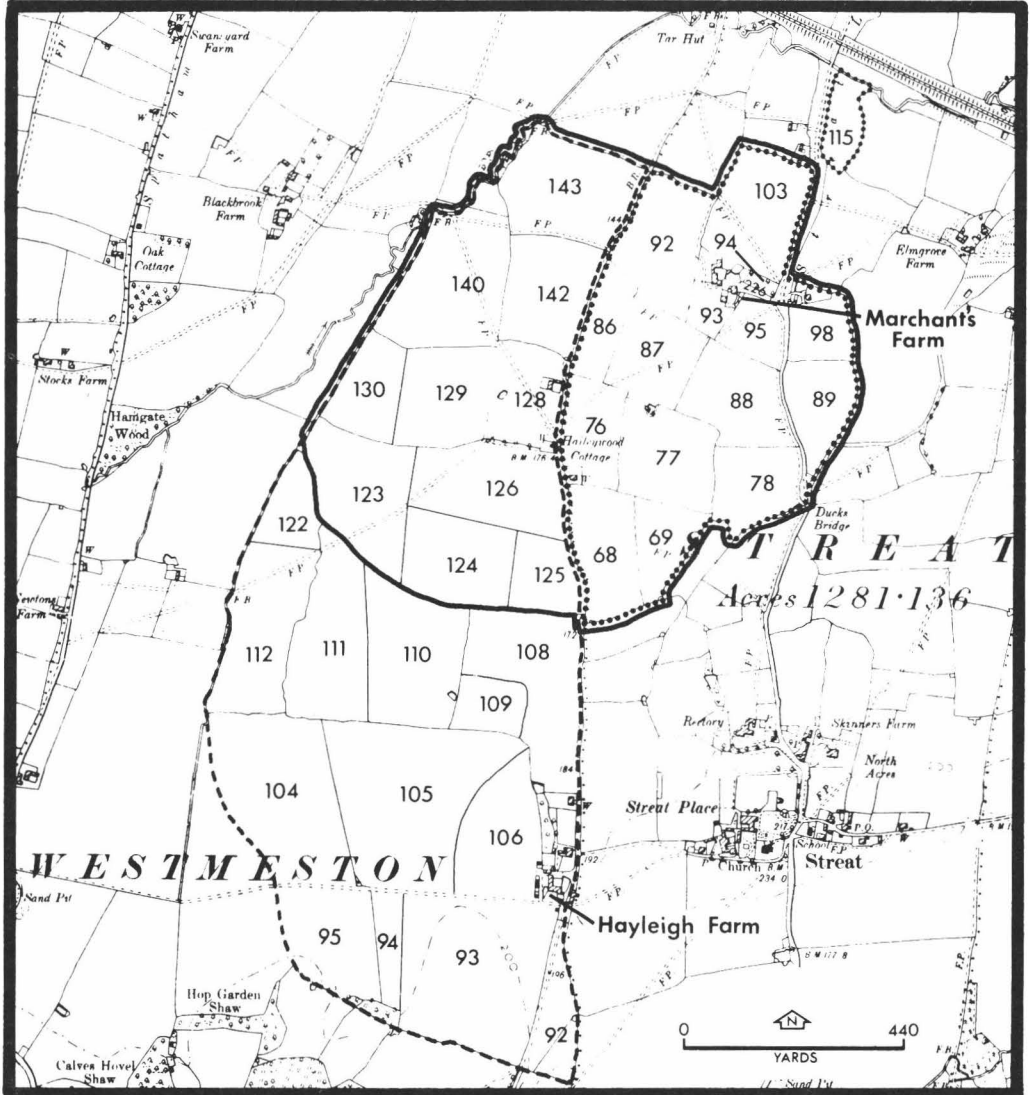
I

Historians of the agriculture of Sussex normally divide the county into four regions; the Coastal Plain, the Downs, the marshland and the Weald. Streat and Westmeston Parishes (within which Hayleigh and Marchant's farms are located) transect the two largest agricultural regions, the Downs and the Weald. From the medieval period the light, naturally well drained chalk soils of the Downs and the narrow belt of sandy soils of the greensand ridges just below their northern scarp slope resulted in the development of large, very profitable capitalist sheep-corn farms, and an open landscape with few trees and hedges. By the 1850s, many Downland farms were between 600 and 1200 acres in extent. The farms on the Downland within Streat and Westmeston parishes were typical of this region.¹

In contrast with the Downs, the Weald is a physically complex region within which most of the soils are difficult to cultivate. The Weald clay belt, which occupies a substantial part of both Streat and Westmeston parishes is especially notorious for its heavy soils which are difficult to drain and hence easily 'poached' by livestock trampling on them. They also require very careful management as arable land; the clay's slowness in drying out in the spring and the speed with which it becomes waterlogged in the autumn have long imposed limitations. These mainly arise from the reduction in time which is available for preparation of the soil and the shorter growing season, particularly in comparison with the Downland region.² The advantages of the Downs for agriculture have been appreciated for centuries. By comparison the Weald, and particularly the clay belt, was normally regarded as handicapped by both its drainage problems and its inferior soils. The agricultural practices which evolved in the Weald were considered backward as late as the interwar period.³ The settlement pattern and the agricultural practices within Streat and Westmeston parishes are typical of the Weald clay zone.

Farmers on the Weald clay adapted to their shorter growing season by developing a pastoral economy which was primarily dependent on cattle livestock breeding and fattening with some sheep keeping. These activities were augmented by sales of wood and wood products and the cultivation of small acreages of wheat as a cash crop on the better drained clay areas of their farms.⁴ Farmers increased the acreage under wheat when high prices encouraged them to take the risk, as in the late

eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, when there was a notable increase in acreage.⁵ Then, new farm buildings and cottages were erected to store crops and to house the extra workers which were required.



BOUNDARIES
 - - - - - Hayleigh 1839 Marchants 1842 ——— Marchants 1982

88 Figures from Tithe Map

Fig. 1. Marchant's and Hayleigh Farms in Streat and Westmeston.

Source for map; Fig. 1: ESRO Tithe Awards and Schedules for Streat and Westmeston. Modern boundaries from present farmer.

The development of the railway system stimulated rural dairying particularly on farms such as Hayleigh and Marchant's which were close to stations which enabled them to conveniently supply fresh milk for the rapidly growing coastal and inland towns, such as Brighton and Haywards Heath.⁶ In the mid-nineteenth century, the fresh milk dairy industry made the farms on the Weald clay more profitable and that encouraged landowners to invest in the new and much more effective field drains which were developed at the same time, and in buildings for the dairy cattle and for pigs (which were fed on the skimmed milk left after cream was made). Dairying saved farms with access to railway stations from the full impact of the agricultural depression in the late nineteenth century, which rapidly undermined the sheep-corn agriculture of the Downland region.⁷ Nevertheless farms on the Weald clay had to alter their output and their methods. Dependence upon milk production increased as the acreage under wheat fell. Farmers sought to diversify by increasing the number of pigs they kept, and by venturing into market gardening, orchard fruit, chicken rearing and other enterprises which were not yet threatened by the growing volume and range of cheaply imported foodstuffs. The area under pasture rose because of the rapid decline in wheat production and the failure to find alternative cash crops which required similar acreage of ground. Many farmers did the same as the tenants of Marchant's and increased their herds by growing more fodder crops but even those covered a smaller acreage than wheat rotations had once occupied.⁸

By the late medieval period, small family farms of between 10 and 30 acres with small fields fringed with high hedges and pockets of woodland were characteristic. Farms slowly increased in size by assarting woodland and waste or by assimilation (e.g. Marchant's). As late as the 1850s, farms of more than 200 acres were not typical and the majority of those (such as Hayleigh) had been long established having been formed between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries when deerparks were disparked for conversion into farms.⁹

The small farm, which was often run by a family perhaps with the help of a couple of farm labourers and seasonal workers (as in the case of Hayleigh and Marchant's), remained characteristic of the Weald clay belt into the twentieth century. Most farmers were tenants — Hayleigh was always a tenanted farm and Marchant's became one in 1827 when the farm was purchased by the Lane estate which already owned Hayleigh. That purchase took place during a period notable in Sussex for the expansion of landed estates at the expense of owner-occupiers.¹⁰ The breakup of landed estates in Sussex from the late nineteenth century affected Marchant's and Hayleigh; both were sold by the heirs of the Lanes during the interwar period.¹⁰ The relative decline in the price of farm land because of the decline in the status and profitability of the ownership of large rural estates resulted in the increase in the number of farms with owner-occupiers and in the purchase of small groups of farms by businessmen.¹¹ Hayleigh is an example of the former and Marchant's of the latter category.

The unsettled period for British agriculture which extended from the 1880s until the 1960s also resulted in major changes in farm boundaries as in the examples of Hayleigh and Marchant's.¹² In both cases the normal practice of retaining the old names was observed.

II

During the early medieval period, settlement on the wooded Weald clay zone in both Streat and Westmeston parishes was sparse. The clay zone was used as pasture for livestock from the farms on the greensand belt and for hunting. By the thirteenth century, cottages were being built on the clay belt in Streat, for example, at Ducksbridge (TQ 352 157, now part of Marchant's Farm) and suitable deposits of clay were being used to make pottery. In Streat, north of Ducksbridge (at TQ 352 163, also on Marchant's Farm), a series of kilns was built in succession on the same site. They produced high quality

pottery as good as the best from Rye or Ringmer during the fourteenth century. As it has been identified at Battle Abbey and at Michelham Priory it had a wide market.¹³

In response to the increasing demand for agricultural land, hunting had to be confined and during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries deer parks were established. Hayleigh was emparked in the fourteenth century at the same time as others in the area such as Little Park in Hurstpierpoint parish and a 500 acre deer park to the north of Ditchling village.¹⁴ Hayleigh was still a park in 1489 for then two people were indicted for hunting in it.¹⁵ By the end of the sixteenth century most of the deer parks, including Hayleigh, had been converted into farms because the demand for agricultural land made farms more profitable. The rising value of the clay zone also encouraged landowners in both parishes to reorganise the rest of their estates and to clear more of the woodland upon it for farming. Clearance of woodland provided the landowners with cash.¹⁶ Then the careful management of the remaining trees in the hedges, thickets and woods which were left provided part of the annual income from the farmland.

The considerable amount of timber suggests that clearance of the area for farming was done by assarting; clearing small fields within the woodland leaving thick hedges called shaws and pockets of woodland on the less attractive soils.¹⁷ Timber on farmland was therefore valued in surveys as an estate asset, as in Sir George Goring's survey of his estate in 1581 which included the manor of Streat. Two hundred acres of farmland in the parish and manor of Streat north of the village, on the Weald clay (including Marchant's) were between 20 and 26 acres and the typical field sizes were between three and five acres valued at £200.¹⁸ The land was divided between eight copyhold farms (including Marchant's) and two smallholdings both of which were newly reclaimed from the adjoining common which occupied the northernmost 200 acres of the parish. The eight farms were between nine and 58 acres in extent and their annual rental value was assessed at between six and thirteen pounds. Four of the farms (including Marchant's) were between 20 and 26 acres and the typical field sizes were between three and five acres. The arable area was normally about a third of the total and farms with more commanded higher rents. The most prevalent land use was meadow.¹⁹

Goring's survey reflected great interest in the management of estates along the scarp foot during the late sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries. Then, the manorial lords of the Manors of Streat, Westmeston and Middleton in Westmeston initiated enclosure of the common fields on the Greensand and the Lower Chalk, the pasture on the Upper Downs and the remaining 'waste' (common woodland and scrub) on the clay. Their principal aim was the separation of their own from tenants' land. This was in order to make management easier by developing larger farms on their own property. Whenever possible, the lords purchased copyholds; otherwise enclosure and exchanges of land by agreement were done whenever the copyholders consented. The manorial lords were less successful in eliminating common fields on the Greensand and Lower Chalk in Westmeston than in Streat and the fossil remnants survived into the early nineteenth century, but they were more successful in enclosing on the clay in Westmeston.²⁰ There, 40 acres of Westmeston Common was enclosed before 1582, Sedlow by 1635 and Middleton by 1684.²¹ In Plumpton, just east of Streat, enclosure of the waste on the clay in the late sixteenth century caused unrest and this may have resulted in more caution in Streat.²² Nevertheless, the 200 acres of common pasture which existed at the northern end of the parish of Streat were enclosed by 1653.²³

The average size of farms on the Weald clay in both parishes rose during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and the number declined as the owners of freehold land successfully established larger farms and the more successful copyholders such as the Tillinghursts, the Shoulders and the Marchants at Marchant's Farm purchased land from their less successful neighbours. As a consequence of the enlargement of farms, the area participated in the 'Great

Rebuilding' of the late 1500s and the early 1600s; Marchant's and Hayleigh farmhouses are good examples of this phenomenon. Houses were built with local timber; licenses to cut timber on copyholds were given by the lord of the manor of Streat between 1580 and 1620. The new buildings, which included barns, and the extension of existing ones, contributed to the clearance of mature timber from the area.²⁴

III

Hayleigh is one of the larger freehold farms on the clay which developed on land that was originally demesne of the manor. As a deer park in the fifteenth century, Hayleigh may have supported about 300 deer, for in the 1570s Danny Park contained that number and was of about the same size. During the sixteenth century, the joint owners of Hayleigh allowed it to be converted into a farm and when the Montagues sold it to Sir Antony Stapley in 1634, he obtained a license to extract marl for the farm from nearby common land belonging to another manor. Hayleigh was bought from the Stapleys in 1676 by Sir Peter Courthope of Danny. That sale separated it from the rest of the demesne of the manor of Middleton. Sir Peter commissioned the survey and map of 1682 by Whitpain (Fig. 2).²⁵ In 1828, W. J. Campion, who had inherited the farm from the Courthopes, sold it to the Lane family, who had already inherited the Dobell estate in Streat and Westmeston (which included Marchant's) and who were to retain both farms until 1906.²⁶

Little information about the management of Hayleigh has been found. In 1682, more of the farm's land was woodland than in 1839 when the Tithe Award and Apportionment showed only a couple of small patches and some hedgerows with trees. Between those dates the tenants of Hayleigh did not make major changes to the internal boundaries, although some of the fieldnames changed.²⁷ The fragmentary evidence for tenancy during the eighteenth century suggests that the rent was comparable to that for farms of a similar size and location on the Danny estate. The Lanes built Hayleigh Cottage (since rebuilt), the barn in the field to the north of the cottage (since demolished) and some of the farmyard buildings. The Springett family who took over the tenancy in the 1820s remained until about 1930.²⁸ At first they managed the farm as a traditional cattle and wheat enterprise but they used the sandy-loam soils at the southern end of the farm more intensively and consequently, by the mid-nineteenth century, the farm employed seven men and two boys, a proportionately larger workforce than Marchant's had.²⁹ By the late nineteenth century, the Springetts had switched from cattle rearing to dairying in which they and their successors continued to specialize until the 1950s when the farm was divided.³⁰

In 1906, Hayleigh was inherited from the Lane family by their relatives, the Fitzhughs who sold it in the 1950s. The new owner divided the farm and sold it. The southern 100 acres remained as Hayleigh Farm but the new farmer specialized in market gardening, taking advantage of the sandy loam soils. The remaining 120 acres was purchased by Lord Manton who sold the southernmost 40 acres to a local farmer and amalgamated the remaining 80 acres with Marchant's Farm whose subsequent development is described below.³¹

IV

Marchant's Farm is typical of the copyhold farms whose successive copyholders were successful farmers who invested their profits in extending the holding. The farm got its name from the Marchant family who inherited it during the 1680s and who remained there until 1827.³² The earliest reference to the farm is in the survey of 1581 (described above) when the occupier was

Robert Picknall. The 26 acre farm was divided between eight fields of between one and six acres, most of which were meadow. The agricultural rent was valued as £10.35 and there was sufficient timber on the farm for two loads worth £2 to be cut each year.³³ The farm was an amalgam of three copyholds, Lemons (eight acres), Wilfathers (three acres), and Commers, which was probably fourteen acres to make the total of 26, unless Picknall subleased other copyholds.³⁴ Picknall probably built the earliest part of the present farmhouse which is now the east wing. Its layout was typical of small timber-framed farmhouses of the period. The hall was on one side of the central chimney stack and the parlour on the other. The stairs to the upstairs chambers sloped up the chimney's side within the lobby. Picknall also built the timber-framed five-bay aisled barn which still stands.

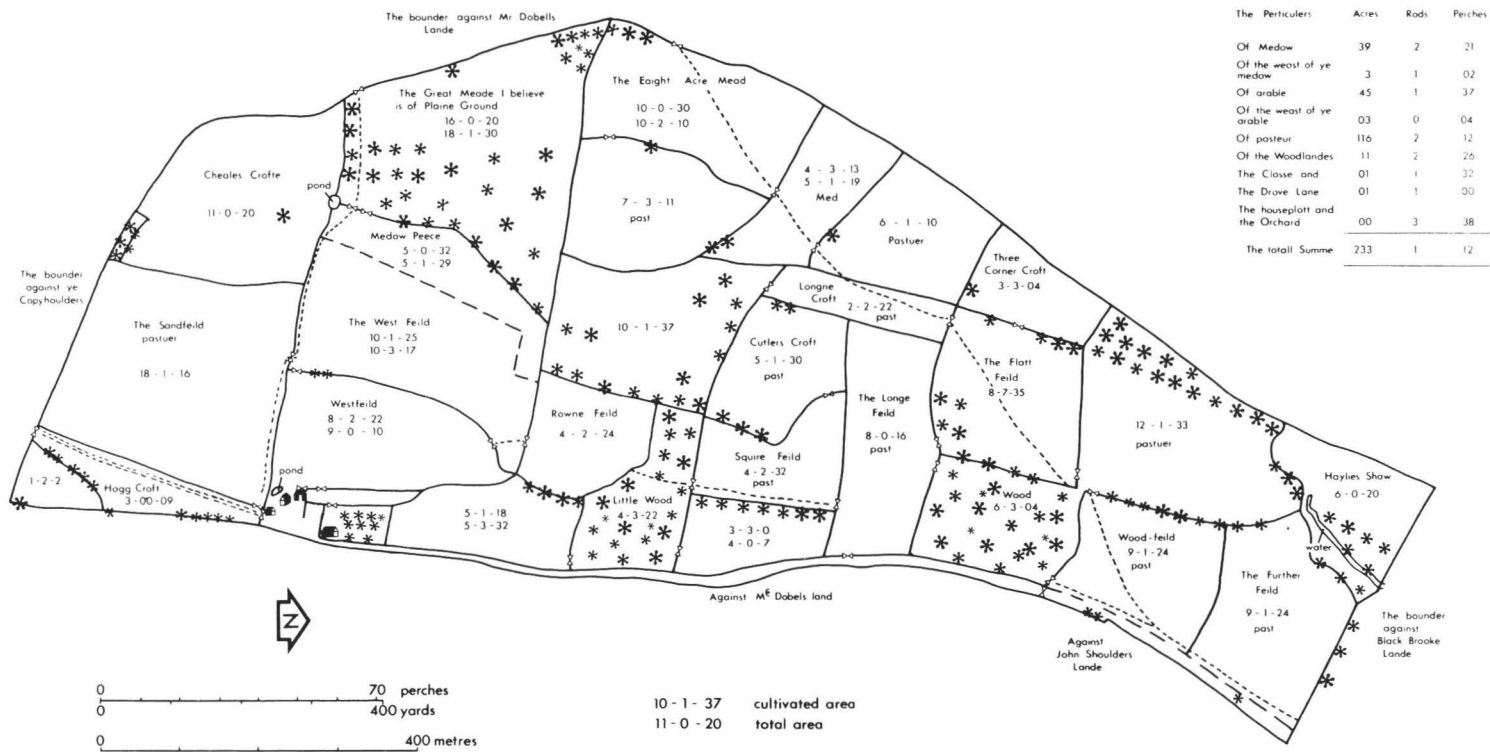
In about 1600, Picknall sold the farm to the Tillinghursts who, in 1620, obtained a licence to cut timber for building for the present north wing of the farmhouse.³⁵ They soon increased the farm's size to 56 acres for they purchased 'Sternes', a 30 acre tenement in 1610. The Shoulder family who purchased the farm in the early 1670s quickly doubled its size to about 110 acres, for in that decade they purchased four copyholds three of which totalled 48 acres. The acreage of the fourth is unknown, but its copyhold rent suggests that it was several acres in extent.³⁶ Three of the four copyholds had names which reflect the reclamation of the land from woodland and waste; Grubbs, Riddens and Woodlands.³⁷ In addition, the Shoulders purchased some manorial freehold but there is no evidence of their extent or of the dates of purchase.³⁸ By 1682, when the map of Hayleigh Farm was drawn (Fig. 2), the Shoulders had extended Marchant's Farm so that it abutted onto Hayleigh's eastern boundary and Shoulder's name is on the map.

In 1684, the farm passed by marriage to the Marchant family when John married Elizabeth Shoulder. The Marchants expanded the farm by purchasing a five acre copyhold in 1696 and another of about 10 acres in 1746, so increasing the farm's size to over 125 acres.³⁹ No additional purchases were made. The southern wing of the farmhouse was added in the early 1700s. From the late seventeenth century, Marchant's was both a comparatively large copyhold farm and the largest farm on the Weald clay in Streat. When compared with farms on the clay in Westmeston to the west and Plumpton to the east, only freehold farms such as Hayleigh were larger.⁴⁰

The Marchant's fortunes declined rapidly after 1800. In 1801 about 45 acres of Marchant's Farm was sold by Richard Marchant, which reduced the farm's size to about 80 acres. Then the family's land in Westmeston and Plumpton was sold. Finally, in 1827, the trustees of Richard Marchant's will sold Marchant's to the Lane family for £1700, but Emma, his widow, retained two cottages which the Lanes purchased later.⁴¹ The Lanes did not alter the farm's boundaries (Fig. 1), but they extended the farm buildings, built a separate granary, the farm cottages opposite the entrance to the farm on the east side of Streat Lane and a pair of semi-detached cottages on the farm's western boundary (since demolished).⁴²

From 1827, the tenants were the Fitzhugh family, who were the incumbents of the parish.⁴³ The Fitzhughs put a baliff into the farmhouse and lived at Streat Place. From the 1820s until the mid 1850s, they ran the farm as a stock and wheat enterprise but then changed to dairying so taking advantage of proximity to the railway station at Plumpton. In 1856, the Fitzhughs rented additional fields from Shergold's and Elmgrove Farms to increase their acreage from 80 to 150 acres. The dairy was in the west wing of the farmhouse. By 1881, when a valuation of the farm was taken, the farm had been reduced to about 90 acres in extent, and consisted of the original 80 acre farm and a couple of fields rented from Skinner's Farm. The rent was £127.⁴⁴ The total valuation of Rev. Fitzhugh's assets as tenant was £805, of which the dairy herd was a quarter. The crops in the valuation reflect the needs of a dairy farm; there were haystacks of meadow and of clover hay, a

A Survey of Hayleigh Farm lying in the parish of Westmeston in ye County of Sussex now belonging to Peter Courthop Esq^r: surveyed and plotted by Robert Whitpaine 1682



MARCHANT'S AND HAYLEIGH FARMS

Fig. 2. Hayleigh Farm in 1682.

Source for map: ESRO, AMS 5857.

'poor lot' of beans in a store, peas, ryegrass, tares. The cash crop was white wheat for which dung and bone manure were used as fertilizers. The incoming tenant, Mr Cornwall, purchased the dairy utensils and may have bought the herd of 15 Alderney cows and William, the young Jersey bull.⁴⁵ In 1920, four of Mr. Cornwall's children purchased the farm from Mrs. Bottomley, who was H. C. Lane's widow, and they sold the farm in 1954 to Lord Manton as a dairy enterprise. He then amalgamated the northern 80 acres of Hayleigh with Marchant's to enlarge the latter to 160 acres.⁴⁶ The farm continued to specialize in dairying until it was sold in 1969 to the present owner-occupier, Mr. P. Heagarty.⁴⁷

The management of the modern 160 acre Marchant's Farm continued the post-Second World War trend away from cattle. At present, about half the farm produces grain and the rest is pasture, supporting a herd of about 70 cattle (21 cows, with calves and yearlings plus a bull). In 1982, the arable was divided between 14 acres of winter barley, three acres of winter oats and 67 acres of winter wheat. About a third of the farm's income is from the sale of cattle and two-thirds from grain. The ratio of income on farms in the region from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries was the reverse. The permanent labour force is also smaller than before, consisting of one full-time worker with part-time help from the owner and casual labour during the hay harvest and winter sowing time.⁴⁸

The management of both farms was dominated by regional changes in agricultural practices. Hayleigh was of a suitable size and layout for the changes in practice which occurred until the 1950s, and until then no changes were made to the farm's acreage. The owners or the tenants of Marchant's normally attempted to enlarge the farm's acreage which suggests that it was too small to make the best use of the current agricultural practices. Even today, at 160 acres, Marchant's is only just viable as a profitable farm.

Although Hayleigh was an estate farm until the 1950s, and Marchant's became one in 1827, this research had to depend heavily upon standard sources, such as the land tax, manor court books, street directories and the tithe award and schedule. In common with many farms in the Weald, both farms lack detailed management records either because they never existed or because they have been lost. Nevertheless much may be learnt about such farms which may be examined in the context of our present knowledge of the main trends of agricultural change in the Weald as described in the first part of this article. These case studies also help to exemplify and so improve our detailed knowledge of agricultural history and our research methods which must cope with the imperfections of the resources which are available.

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TABLE 1 Summary of the valuation of Marchant's Farm in 1881

				£	p	Approx. % of total				
Cattle	NM	CD		93.		12				
Pigs	L	CD		7.		1				
Cows	UUM			223.00		28				
Horses	CLA			178.00		22				
Implements	CMN	a		139.00		17				
Corn etc	CMU	a		132.40		16				
Harness	UC	R	R	21.32½		3				
Dairy Utensils	U			2.00		0.2				
	AdB	U	R	804.		100				
Settled at 15% lower Code (not given in the valuation books)	RAM	Ed	R	£683.32½						
	C	U	M	B	E	R	L	A	N	D
	I	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	0

Source: ESRO BMW A2/12

References

Acknowledgements; my thanks to Dr. C. Brent and Mr C. Whittick for their help.

¹J. A. Brent, 'Aliciston Manor in the Middle Ages', *Sussex Archaeological Collections* (hereafter *S.A.C.*) 106 (1968), 89-102. W. Budgen, 'The working of a medieval manor', *Sussex Notes and Queries* 9 (1942), 10-13, 34-7, 59-61. A. J. Taylor, ed., *Records of the Barony, Honour and Rape of Sussex*, Sussex Record Society vol. 44 (1939), 70-1, 78-9. S. Farrant, 'The management of four estates in the lower Ouse valley (Sussex) and agricultural change, 1840-1920', *Southern History* 1 (1979), 155-70. S. Farrant, 'The changing structure of landownership in the lower Ouse valley, 1780-1880', *S.A.C.* 116 (1978), 261-8.
²P. Brandon, *The Sussex landscape* (Hodder and Stoughton, 1974), 36-7.
³Brandon, ch. 8.
⁴C. Brent, 'Rural population and employment in Sussex between 1540 and 1640', *S.A.C.* 114 (1976), 27-48. Brandon, ch. 5.
⁵Brandon, ch. 6.
⁶D. Taylor, 'The English dairy industry', *Economic History Review* 29 (1976), 585-91.
⁷Farrant (1979), 155-70.
⁸PRO, MAFF 68, 4th June returns quinquennially 1870-1930.
⁹ESRO, Tithe Award and Schedules for Streat, Plumpton and Westmeston.
¹⁰Farrant (1978), 261-8. Deeds for Marchant's Farm held by the owner, Mr. P. Heagarty.
¹¹Deeds of Marchant's Farm as above.
¹²Deeds and as shown on Fig. 1 from Mr. Heagarty's map.
¹³The kiln site was dug by Mr. Con Ainsworth from 1979-82 and he has the pottery and plans at present (1983). The cottage site was dug by him in 1982. Mr. Heagarty owns both sites.
¹⁴L. F. Salzman, ed., *Victoria History of the County of Sussex* 7 (1947), 104. Brent (1976), 48. P. Brandon, 'Common lands and wastes of Sussex', Univ. Lond. Ph.D. thesis (1963), unpublished; parks gazetteer.
¹⁵PRO KB 9/382.

¹⁶Brandon (1963), 104-11. ESRO Danny 1126.
¹⁷ESRO Danny 1126.
¹⁸*Ibid.*
¹⁹*Ibid.*
²⁰ESRO new accession map of Streat Place and Gote Farms, part of the Lane estate. c. 1815. ESRO, SAS 'M' Collection, including 282, 284, 290; see Sussex Record Society vol. 24, which catalogues them.
²¹ESRO M282, 284, 290, etc. Brandon (1963), 155-6.
²²Brandon (1963), 158.
²³ESRO M303-5, 312-4, 330. Brandon (1974), 167.
²⁴ESRO M/a 1-6.
²⁵ESRO Danny 1319-1342. B. L. Add'l Charters 29655, 29656.
²⁶ESRO Land Tax.
²⁷ESRO, Tithe Award and Schedule.
²⁸ESRO, Land Tax. Kelly's Post Office Directories.
²⁹PRO, Census Enumerator's Schedules 1961.
³⁰Kelly's Post Office Directories.
³¹Deeds of Marchant's Farm from Mr. Heagarty, the owner. Information from Mr. Open, the retired farm manager.
³²ESRO Danny 1126; M/a 1-6.
³³ESRO Danny 1126.
³⁴ESRO M3a 1-6.
³⁵*Ibid.*
³⁶*Ibid.*
³⁷*Ibid.*
³⁸*Ibid.*
³⁹*Ibid.*
⁴⁰ESRO Tithe Award and Schedule. PRO, Census Enumerator's Schedules.
⁴¹ESRO M/a 10.
⁴²Demolished by Mr. Heagarty.
⁴³ESRO, Land Tax, Streat.
⁴⁴Valuation see Table 1. ESRO, Par 488/1: Land Tax for Plumpton and Westmeston.
⁴⁵See Table 1.
⁴⁶Deeds from Mr. Heagarty, owner of Marchant's.
⁴⁷Mr. Heagarty and Kelly's Post Office Directories.
⁴⁸Mr. Heagarty.