

AGRICULTURAL HISTORY IN THE HUNDRED OF HARTFIELD

BY ERNEST STRAKER, F.S.A.

THE Hundred of Hartfield consists of the parishes of Hartfield and Withyham, with small portions in Rotherfield and Buxted.

Neglecting the latter areas, which cannot be precisely ascertained, the two former parishes contained in 1842, according to the Tithe Apportionment, 16,412 acres, viz.

Pasture	5,256 acres
Arable	5,919 „
Wood	1,373 „
Forest, common, &c.	3,857 „
Fractions	7 „
	16,412 „

More than one-half of the private land then belonged to the Buckhurst Estate. Much of this had been in the possession of the Sackvilles since the thirteenth century, several manors were added by Sir Richard Sackville, Chancellor of the Court of Augmentations under Henry VIII, and privy councillor in the reigns of Henry VIII, Mary, and Elizabeth—a very wealthy man. His son Thomas, Lord Buckhurst, High Treasurer to Queen Elizabeth, acquired many more, and in 1597 and 1598 had a Terrier compiled of all his lands in north-east Sussex.

This Terrier, an epitome of which has been published as volume xxxix of the Sussex Record Society, gives the area and cultivation of each field. The beautifully drawn maps, on the scale of 16 in. to the mile, make it possible in almost every case to identify the fields, as the hedges have not altered. It is probable that this survey was one of the first to be made in this country by the then newly introduced plane-table and theodolite. Its accuracy is very remarkable: when reduced to the 6-in. scale the

fields tally almost exactly with the current 6-in. Ordnance maps, and over a total identifiable area of some 3,400 acres the Elizabethan acreage differs from that of the Ordnance Survey of 1870 by little more than one-quarter per cent.

Although much of this land was alienated to satisfy his debts by Richard Sackville, the third Earl of Dorset, in the reign of Charles II, the greater part was gradually repurchased, and by 1799 John Frederick, the third Duke of Dorset, was again in possession of most of the land comprised in the Elizabethan survey.

At that date a large atlas was produced showing the various farms, the scale being 20 chains to the inch, or 4 in. to the mile. This was in the main the work of Wm. Figg of Lewes. On the margin of these maps are the name, cultivation, and area of each field. The total areas differ from the Ordnance Survey by less than three-quarters of one per cent. In 1842 and 1843 the surveys for the Tithe Apportionments were made, the total area agreeing almost exactly with the Ordnance. In 1875 the indexes to the 25-in. maps give the cultivation and the respective areas to three places of decimals. For the purpose of the accompanying tables the areas as given in this survey have been taken, for the sake of clearness, in round acres, and the trifling differences reconciled.

In 1815, the male line of the Sackvilles having become extinct, the Sussex estates devolved by marriage on the fifth Earl De La Warr. In 1910 his grandson, the eighth Earl, put up the greater part of the demesnes in Hartfield Hundred for sale at auction, and an elaborate catalogue, with a map based on the 1870 Ordnance Survey, was issued, with area and cultivation of each field.

We have thus an opportunity, which is perhaps unique, of recording not only by tables, but graphically by maps, the land utilization at six different dates over a period of 336 years, the 1934 record being based on observation.

The area selected for comparison is a block measuring five miles from west to east, and one and three-quarter miles from north to south, in the parishes of Hartfield and Withyham, together with two upland farms in Hartfield.

The geological formation is Hastings Sand, with its subdivisions of Ashdown Sand on the south, and Wadhurst Clay, Upper and Lower Tunbridge Wells Sand on the north, all much varied and faulted.

The River Medway runs in an easterly direction along the whole five miles, receiving on the south side two considerable affluents from the high ground of Ashdown Forest, here rising to a height of 700 ft., another from Broadwater Forest, and on the north one from the vicinity of East Grinstead.

The fall is slight, being about 40 ft. from the extreme west to the north-east corner of the five-mile strip. The elevation on the north rises to about 300 ft. above sea-level, on the south to 375 ft. near Hunt's Farm.

The floor of the valley is level, subject to flooding, and has a great depth of gravel and silt, much of which must have been deposited during the last 300 years. The hammerpond at Parrock Forge, just outside the western section map, has completely filled up since the sixteenth century and of another pond three-quarters of a mile lower down no trace is visible. There have been several instances of change of course of the river, both before and after 1598.

There is no evidence of artificial flooding of the water-meadows in this particular area, although there are some traces of this in the district. Naturally the land along the stream has always been under grass, except in a few cases where the deep silt has been utilized for hop gardens.

The distinction between meadows mown for hay and ordinary pasture is only recorded for 1598 and 1842, indicated on the maps by the scythe symbol; at the other dates the area under grass is stated as a whole and shown white on the maps.

At the earlier dates some of these hay meadows were attached to and let with upland farms, for provision of winter fodder. There is no trace, however, of the common field system.

In the past an important feature was the right of common in Ashdown Forest. In the Parliamentary

Survey of 1658 the two parishes were allotted 788 acres of forest, with the right to graze thereon 485 head of cattle.

Owing perhaps to their origin as forest clearings, and also partly to the frequent gills and brooks, the fields are usually quite small, and often divided by shaws rather than hedges.

The utilization of the land at the different dates is shown by the accompanying maps and tables.

In 1598 less than a third was under the plough, and leases of 1651 show but a slight increase, but in 1799 one-half of the land was arable. The proportions in 1842 were almost the same, and agree very well with those of the Tithe Apportionments of the two parishes, excluding the Forest, which were grass 40 per cent., arable 47 per cent., wood 11 per cent., sundry (assumed) 2 per cent. In the thirty-three years to 1875 a considerable reduction of arable took place, and in the next thirty-five years to 1910 this process was accelerated. By 1934 nearly three-fourths of the former arable had gone down to grass, and had the survey been made a little earlier the proportion would have been even less, owing to the operation of the wheat subsidy. A factor in the reduction of ploughland has been the disuse of the old turn-wrist plough, which, especially when oxen were used, made the cultivation of the steeper slopes easier.

The amount of woodland has not greatly varied, clearing in some places being balanced by the planting of cover for sporting purposes in others. The areas shown in the tables are understated, as the surveyors in most cases included the numerous shaws in the measurement of the respective fields. The minor shaws are omitted from the maps for the sake of clearness.

The ancient marlpits, which are so characteristic of this district, are usually wooded and are included in the woodland area. Gervase Markham, in his *Inrichment of the Weald of Kent*, 1625, states that the ancient practice of marling had gone out of use until revived *circa* 1590. The pits here are much older. In an inquisition post mortem of the manor of Buckhurst, February 1273, the

jurors say that there were 80 acres of marl land worth 6*d.* per acre, and 100 acres non-marl worth 2*d.* only.

The utilization of the land at the various dates is shown in the following tables, the nearest acre being taken. Farm-houses and yards, gardens, &c., are entered as sundry.

TABLE I

Total areas on farms where all six dates are on record

	1598	1799	1842	1875	1910	1934
Meadow . . .	455	..	427	..	..	..
Pasture . . .	810	..	504	..	..	..
Total under grass .	1,265	848	931	1,075	1,345	1,714
Arable . . .	721	1,203	1,109	972	699	330
Wood . . .	299	239	241	228	230	230
Sundry . . .	38	33	42	48	49	49
Total acres . . .	2,323	2,323	2,323	2,323	2,323	2,323

TABLE II

Total areas on farms lacking records for 1598

	1598	1799	1842	1875	1910	1934
Meadow	101	..	..	..
Pasture	206	..	..	..
Total under grass .	..	293	307	385	404	549
Arable	357	341	262	240	95
Wood	34	37	36	39	39
Sundry	12	11	13	13	13
Total acres	696	696	696	696	696

TABLE III

Total areas on farms lacking records for 1910

	1598	1799	1842	1875	1910	1934
Meadow . . .	52	..	20	..	..	..
Pasture . . .	131	..	103	..	..	..
Total under grass .	183	134	123	146	..	254
Arable . . .	75	123	132	109	..	..
Wood . . .	9	8	11	11	..	11
Sundry . . .	2	4	3	3	..	4
Total acres . . .	269	269	269	269	..	269

SYMBOLS



MEADOW



GRASS



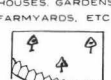
ARABLE



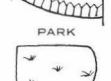
WOOD



HOUSES, GARDENS, FARMYARDS, ETC.



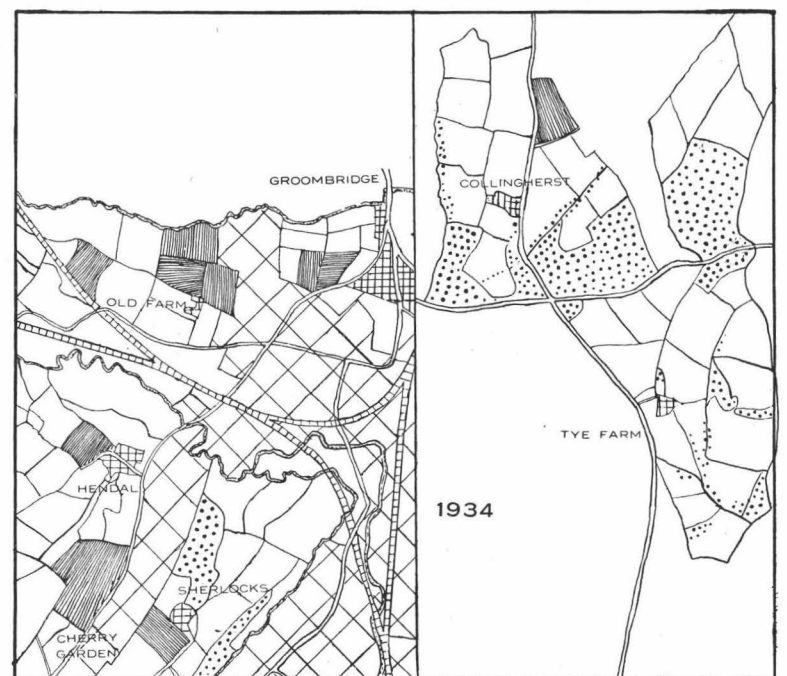
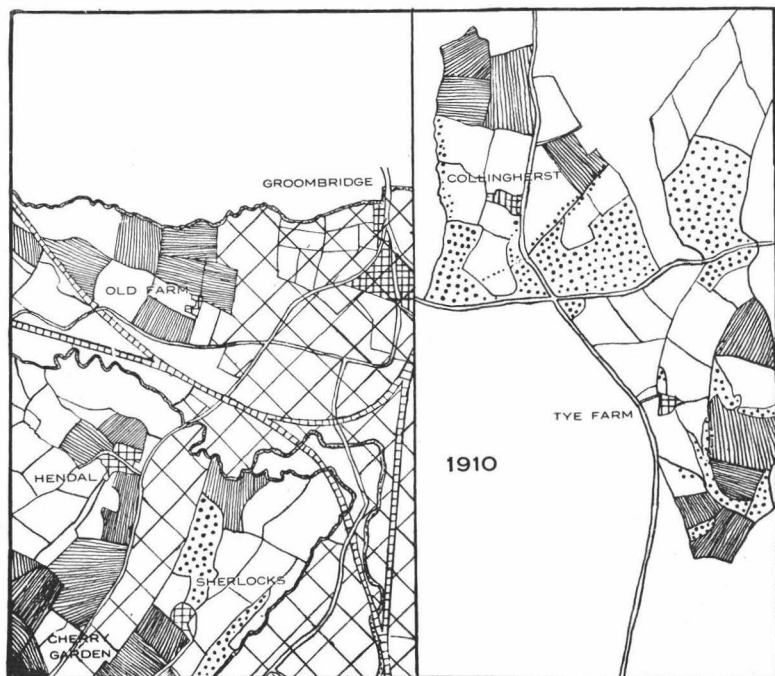
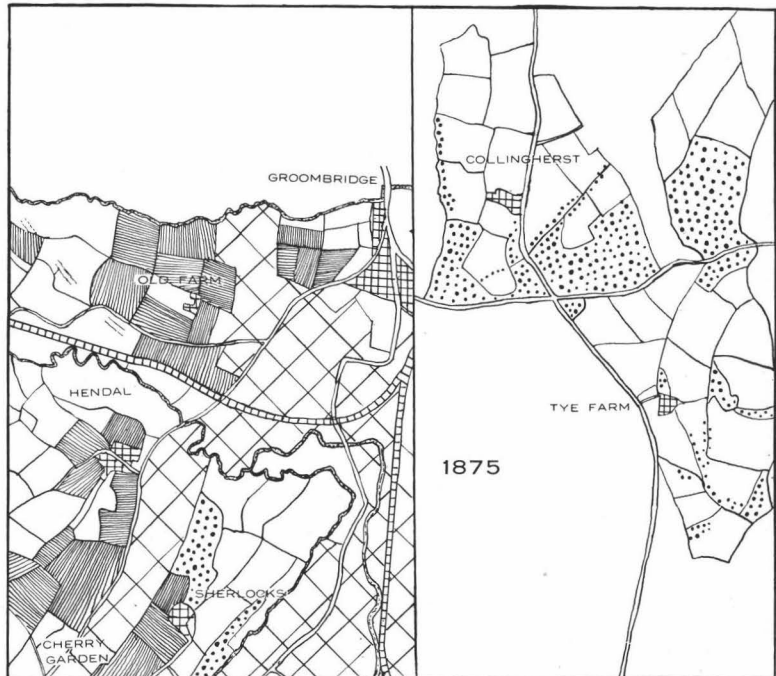
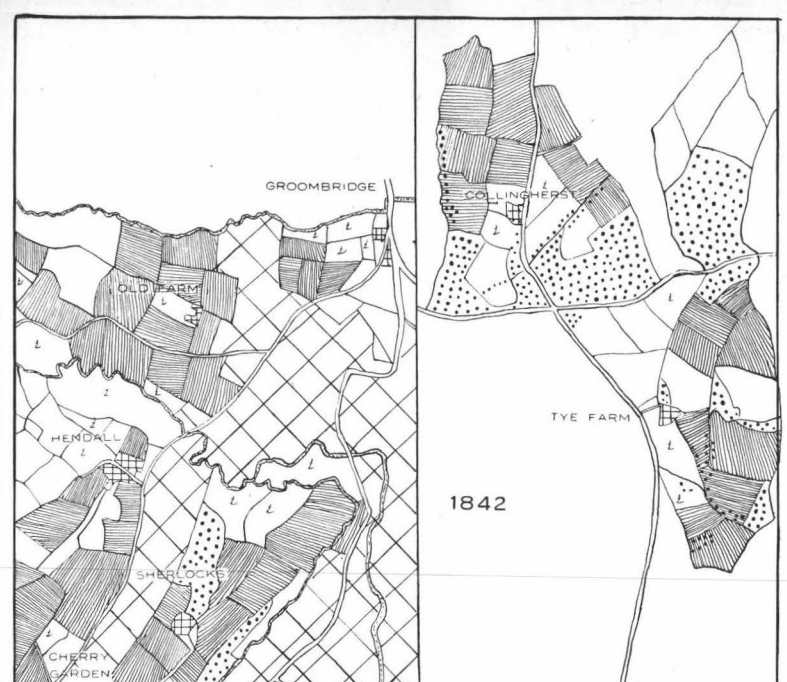
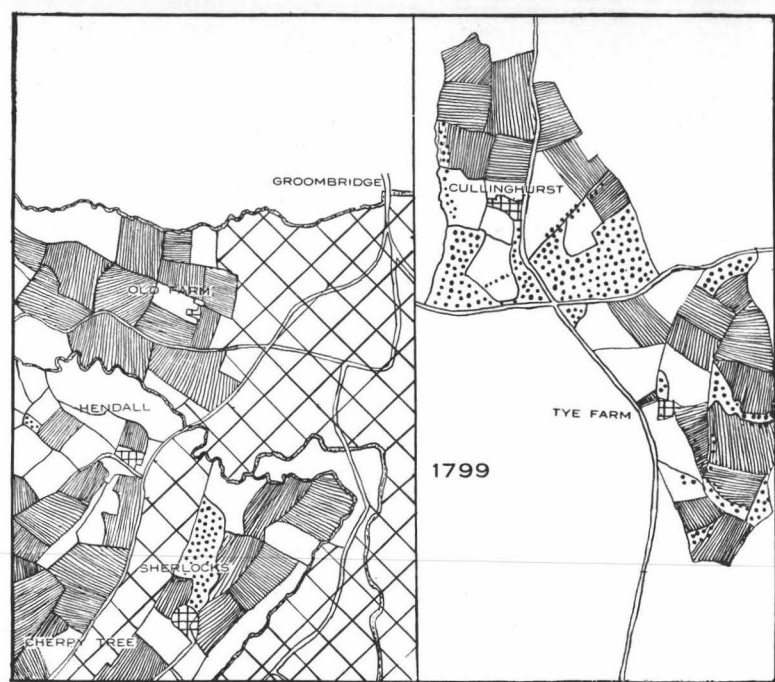
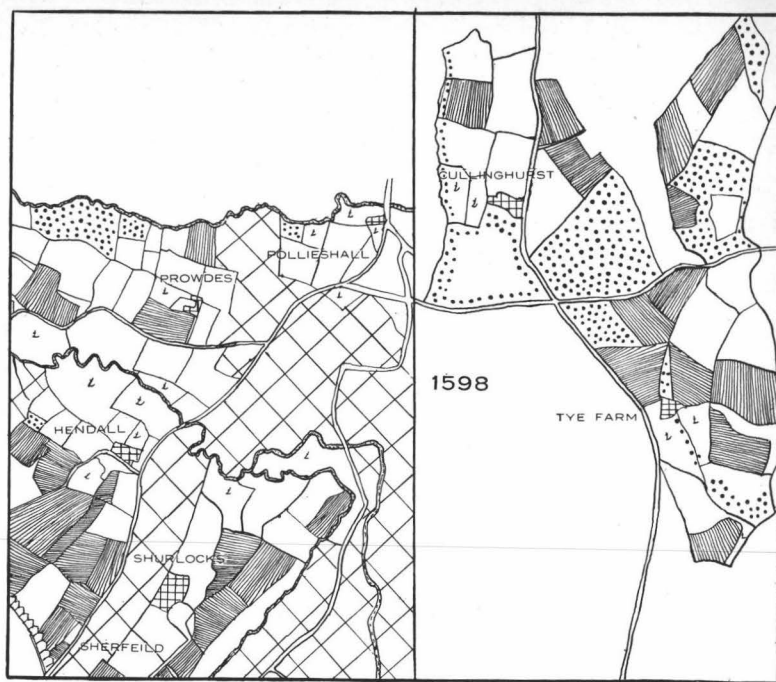
PARK



COMMON



NO RECORD



Based upon the Ordnance Survey by permission.

EASTERN SECTION.

NORTHERN FARMS.

Scale two inches to one mile.

E. Straker del.

SYMBOLS



MEADOW



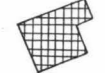
GRASS



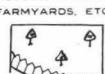
ARABLE



WOOD



HOUSES, GARDENS, FARMYARDS, ETC.



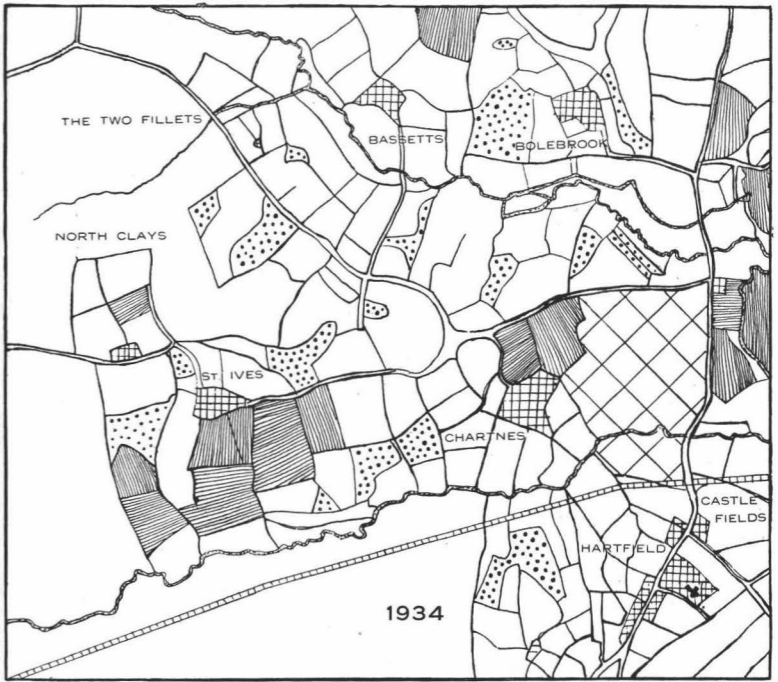
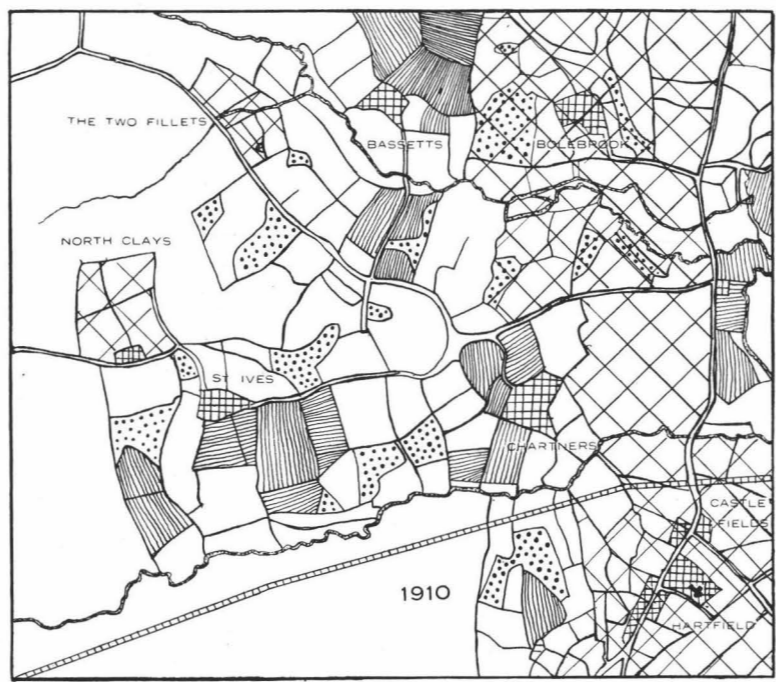
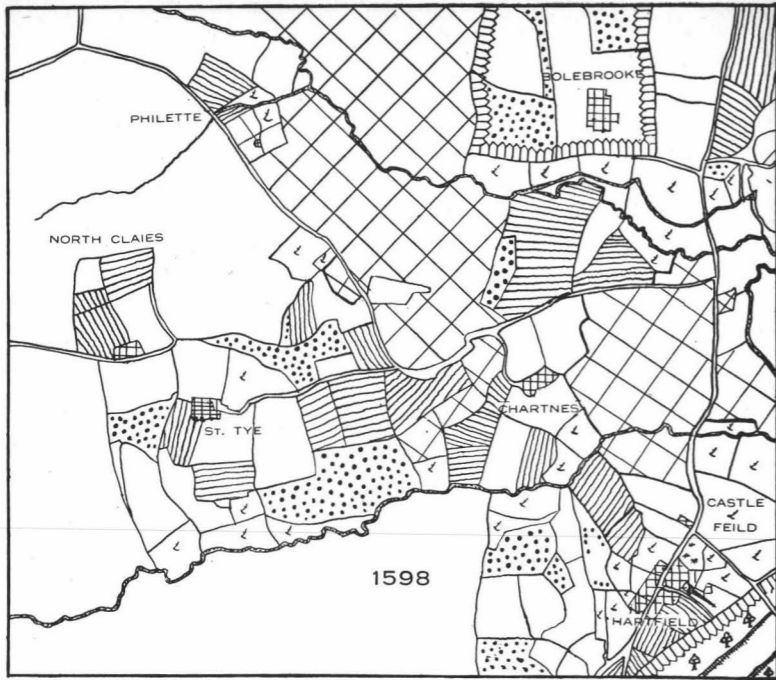
PARK



COMMON



NO RECORD



Based upon the Ordnance Survey by permission.

WESTERN SECTION.

Scale two inches to one mile.

E. Straker del.

SYMBOLS



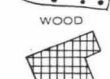
MEADOW



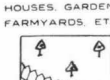
GRASS



ARABLE



WOOD



HOUSES, GARDENS, FARMYARDS, ETC.

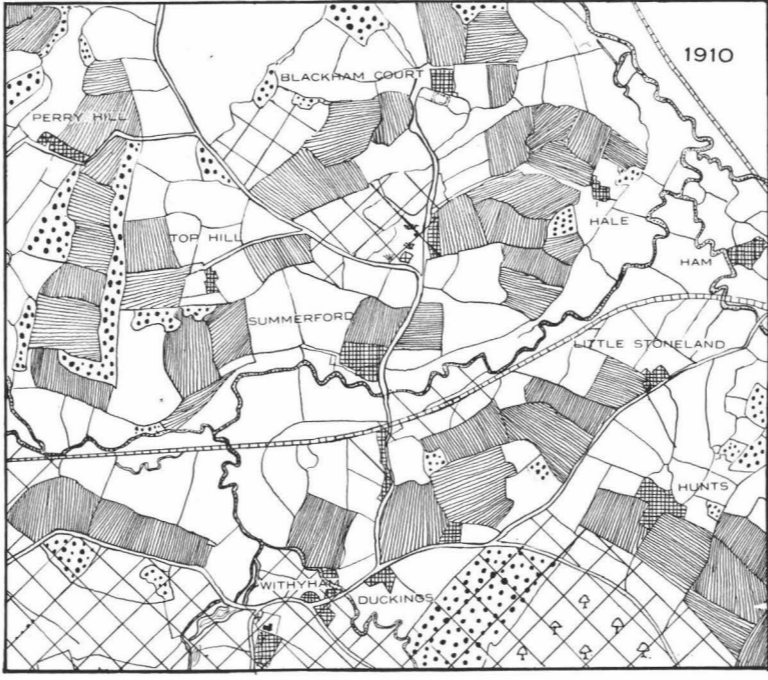
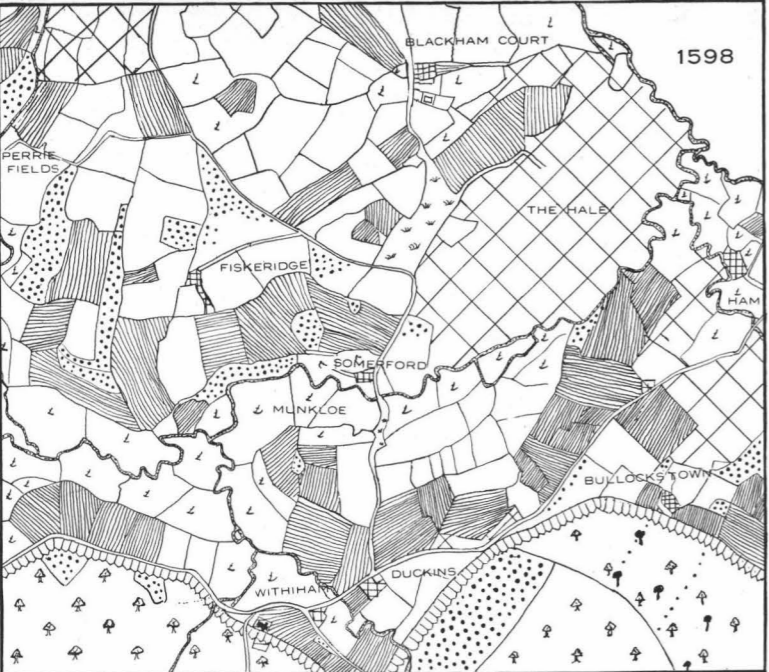


PARK



COMMON

NO RECORD



Based upon the Ordnance Survey by permission.

CENTRAL SECTION.
Scale two inches to one mile.

E. Straker del.

The above tables combined in due proportion give the following percentages:

	<i>1598</i>	<i>1799</i>	<i>1842</i>	<i>1875</i>	<i>1910</i>	<i>1934</i>
Meadow . . .	21	..	17	..	..	..
Pasture . . .	34	..	24	..	..	..
Total under grass .	55	40	41	49	59	77
Arable	31	50	49	41	31	13
Wood	12	8	8	8	8	8
Sundry	2	2	2	2	2	2
	100	100	100	100	100	100