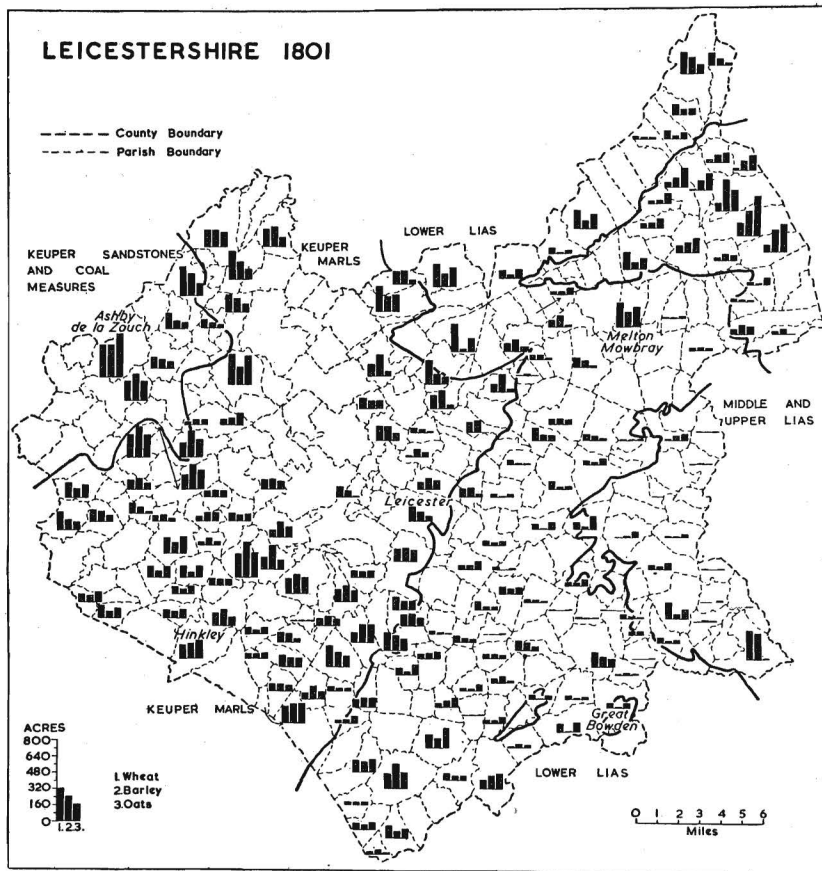


MAP VI



The 1801 Crop Returns

# THE 1801 CROP RETURNS: GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTIONS

by

Harry C. K. Henderson

In Volume XXIV of these *Transactions* Dr. W. G. Hoskins examined the details of the 1801 Crop Returns of Leicestershire from the point of view of the economic historian, but did not attempt to map the statistics. The present paper endeavours to supply, as an addendum to Dr. Hoskins's paper, those distributional features which are the interest of the geographer.

The map of the three principal cereals is so constructed that the area covered by the columns is true to scale, and indicates the acreage of each parish which was devoted to these three crops. The absence of a graph in any parish indicates one of the gaps in the manuscript records to which Dr. Hoskins has referred. The correlation of the families of cereals with soils and relief has prompted the inclusion of certain boundaries of the principal geological outcrops on the map.

The only area seriously affected by the absence of records is that to the north-east of Leicester, and as this consists largely of Charnwood, it is probable that little cultivation was practised. In the western part of the county, both on the Coal Measure-Keuper Sandstone area and on the Keuper Marls, it is seen that the three cereals are of very similar importance in most parishes. Attention should be directed towards two small groups of parishes, one to the north of Hinckley and the other just north of Leicester, in which the areas under cereals are relatively small owing to the existence of patches of boulder clay overlying the Keuper Marls.

In 1809 the Board of Agriculture published the second edition of *A General View of the Agriculture of Leicestershire*, written by William Pitt of Wolverhampton. Pitt estimated that on soils which he described as mild, moderate and friable loams (probably the Keuper Marl soils), the following five-course rotation was practised on about 120,000 acres of arable land:

1. Oats or wheat or occasionally barley.
2. A green crop, turnips, swedes or cabbages.
3. Barley with seeds.
4. } Pasture and clover mown.
5. }

On this basis one would expect the barley acreage to be approximately equal to the combined total of wheat and oats, whereas the 1801 statistics reveal nothing more than a slight predominance of barley over wheat in most parishes, while the oats figures are often of similar and sometimes of greater magnitude.

Perhaps the most striking feature of the map is the close correlation of small acreages of grain with the Lower Lias outcrop, but it should be emphasised that this outcrop is largely masked by boulder clays, of which the more northerly are described by the Geological Survey as chalky, and

can be assumed, therefore, to be partially limed and more productive. None the less, the general effect of a superficial deposit of clay on a clay bed is very evident throughout the Lower Lias belt, on which there was very little barley and the small amount of land tilled was devoted mainly to wheat or oats. An indication of rather more arable land towards the south is associated with the occurrence of sands and gravels among the glacial deposits.

The most easterly zone, the Middle and Upper Lias, has mainly clay soils, and only to the north-east of Melton Mowbray was there any considerable acreage of arable land. The soils here are developed on the sands and limestones of the Northampton Sand of the Inferior Oolite Series and are not masked by superficial deposits, whence the arable acreage is much greater than in any other part of East Leicestershire. Wheat was relatively unimportant, and the oats acreage was greater than that of barley in most cases.

In both the Lower Lias and eastern zones the rotations quoted by Pitt seem to be at variance with the 1801 statistics. While not distinguishing between three zones, he quotes, for the stronger soils, rotations which should result in similar acreages for wheat and barley and a rather smaller figure for oats. On the other hand, the statistics suggest that barley was little grown on the clays and that wheat was of little importance in the east, while oats were relatively prominent in both regions.

The records of yields in the Leicestershire returns are fewer than in most counties, and as, with two exceptions, they were returned for parishes with clay soils, they tell little. The parishes of Rearsby and Syston both lie on the gravel terraces of the Soar, just north of Leicester, and are recorded as having high yields, as one might expect. Amongst the remainder, one is doubtful as to the accuracy of the wheat yield of 22 bushels per acre returned for Old Dalby, which lies on the Lower Lias clays only a couple of miles west of Long Clawson, for which a yield of 32 bushels was returned, though it is very similarly situated.

From the geographer's standpoint, the great value of these statistics lies in the opportunity they offer to map and study some of the crop distributions of our counties some forty years earlier than the tithe documents allow, and sixty-five years before the first statistics collected by the Board of Agriculture. The possibility of studying the present in the light of the past is thereby extended back in time to one hundred and fifty years, indeed to a time when the Industrial Revolution had barely begun to leave its mark on the countryside.