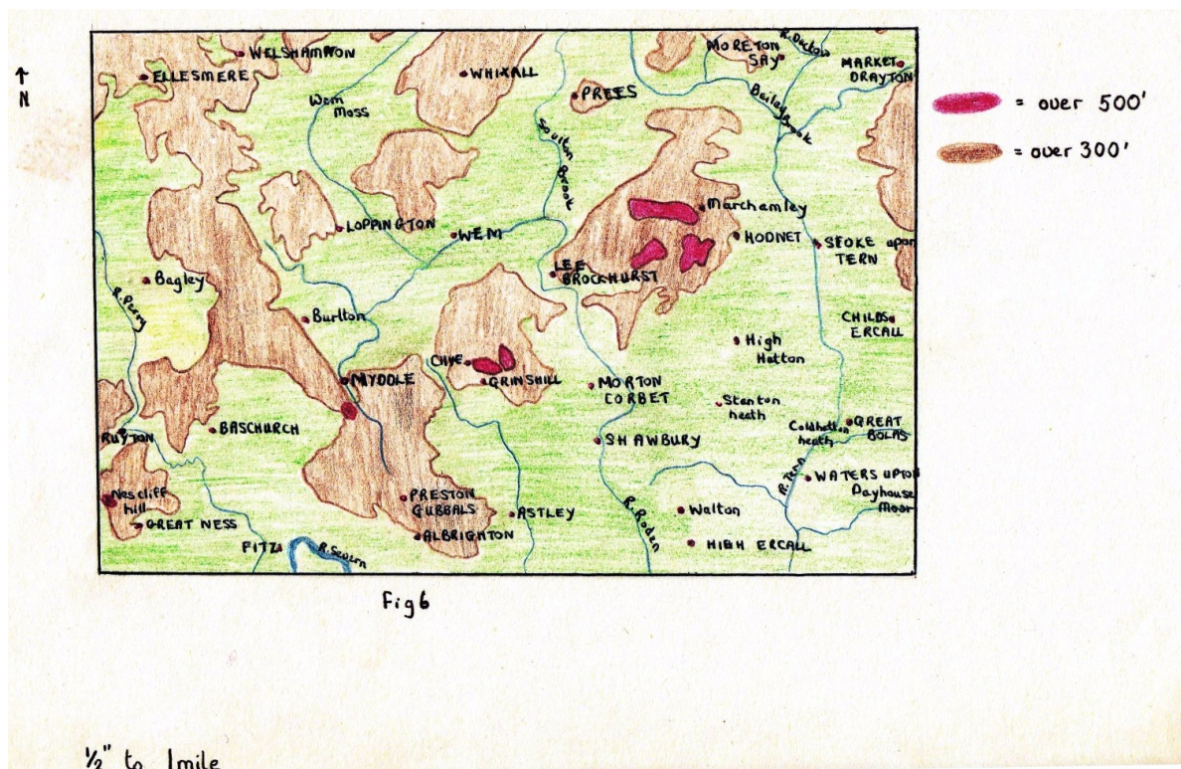


Agriculture

Geographical and geological description of the area

The Wem district of Shropshire is essentially rural in character and has been little influenced by the growth of industries. The numerous small villages are mostly of ancient origin. The area forms the southern part of the Cheshire Plain and is bounded on the west by the Welsh Uplands, on the south by the hills of South Shropshire and on the north east by the foothills of the Pennine chain. The greatest part of the area consists of undulating plains 250 – 300 feet above sea level, broken only by low hills whose steep slopes form landmarks in the highly cultivated countryside.



Map of the Wem district of Shropshire

The more prominent hills occur mostly in a broken ridge along a diagonal from south west to the north east, the highest point being Nesscliffe (515 ft), Pim Hill (536 ft), Grinshill (629 ft) and Hawkestone (681 ft).

“All subdivisions of the Triassic formation are well represented and structurally they form an elongated syncline with its axis running south west to north east from Myddle to a point near Prees. Faulting has produced a chain of hills; clearly visible is Nesscliffe, Pim Hill, Grinshill and Hawkestone. The highest points of the central chain of hills are capped by the beds known as the Ruyton and Grinshill Sandstone. Good exposures can be seen on Pim Hill and Myddle Hill and a nodular sandstone is very conspicuous in the narrow lanes immediately north of Clive Church. The rock being sufficiently hard is quarried for free stone

and has been widely used for building and its resistant nature has accentuated the steepness of the faulted hills on which it rests.”¹

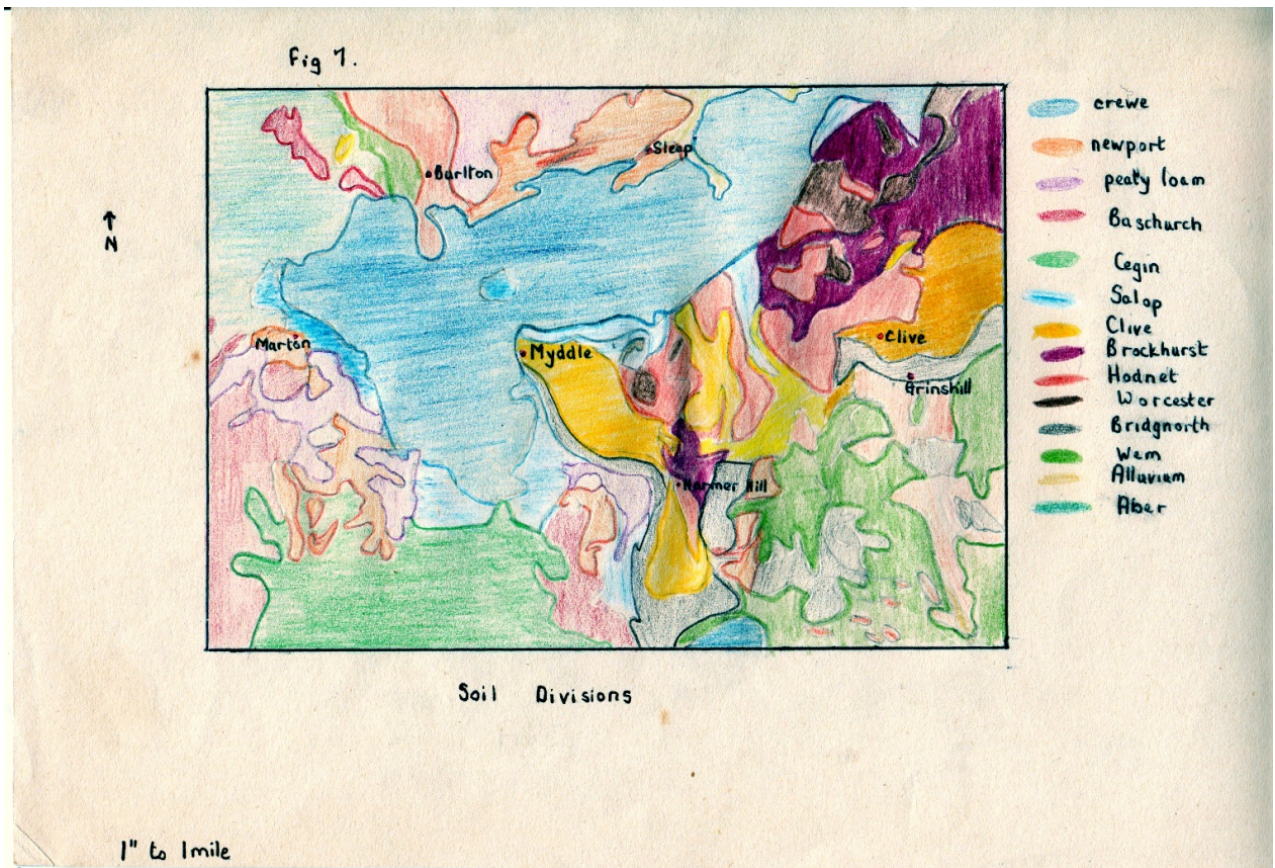
The brown earths which cover a large part of the Wem district have a fairly high population of earthworms and other small animals whose activities promote the circulation of both mineral and organic matter and lead to a more even distribution and incorporation of humus in the upper layer of the soils so that there is no sharp division between it and the subsoil.

Baschurch loam and loamy sand constitute some of the best arable soils in the area, their light texture and free drainage providing easy cultivation at all seasons and tending to produce early growth.

The Clive soils are distinguished by the warm brown coloured surface passing to a grey or yellowish grey weathering sandstone at no great depth. The series is found on the highest points of the central chain of hills and is best displayed near Myddle, between Clive and Preston Brockhurst and in smaller areas near Hodnet. Clive loamy sand and particularly its deeper phase are very productive and are regarded as most valuable soils. The soils are used for mixed farming as their good drainage and loamy texture fit them for almost any crop. The Hodnet series has bands of sandstone and marl alternate. A good expanse of this occurs in Bilmarsh Lane leading north from Alderton. Some of the most valuable land of the country is found on the Hodnet series and the free drainage of the soils combined with a loamy texture and good depth make it very suited to mixed farming.

An extensive and continuous area of flat or gently sloping land lying between 250 and 300 feet stretching south west to north east on the northern side of the central ridge from Myddlewood to Aston, is occupied by soils of the Crewe series. The natural drainage of the sites is not satisfactory, and water lies about on the surface after rain. The very poor drainage and heavy texture of soil is responsible for their being mainly under grassland.

¹ E Crompton and D A Osomond, “The Soils of the Wem District of Shropshire” (HMSO, 1954)



Map showing Soil Divisions

Cultivation

Much of north Shropshire has been cultivated for many centuries and the present character of the soils owes a great deal to the activities of generations of farmers. The pattern of soil distribution has influenced the whole life of the countryside throughout the ages but while it can be said in a general way that the land tends to be farmed so that it yields the greatest profit to the occupier, it does not necessarily follow that the farming system is dictated entirely by material circumstances; history has played a part.

After the Ice Age it is probable that North Shropshire supported woodland with a very open canopy and a ground vegetation predominantly of grasses. Such relatively open country was used from the earliest times and most of the Stone Age implements found within the area covered by the Wem district have been associated with light soils. It was a scene of some activity in the Bronze Age when it appears to have been fairly thickly populated although the primitive implements used probably made little impression on its general character. The early Iron Age people brought a more advanced civilization although largely pastoral and some of the more easily worked sandy soils may have been cultivated for corn until they were exhausted and then allowed to revert to grass or heath.

The Roman Era

The Romans established a flourishing city at Uriconicum, east of Shrewsbury but there is little evidence of the agricultural villa system in Shropshire. The city population would require a considerable amount of wheat, much of which would be produced locally, while stock were almost certainly grazed in the vicinity. It is possible, therefore, that at least some of the lighter soils included in the brown earths have been under cultivation almost from the dawn of the Christian era.

The Celtic Tribal System

The Celtic tribal system appears to have been well-developed and Gray in his study of field systems concluded that the influence of the Anglo Saxon invaders declined rapidly as they approached the Welsh border and a blend of the Celtic and Anglo-Saxon practices gradually developed. Such evidence as there is points to the existence of small village communities living a mainly pastoral life with very small open fields. The cultivated land was divided into two or three open fields which were cropped in a three course rotation of winter corn (wheat or rye), followed by spring corn (oats and barley) with beans, peas and vetches followed by a fallow year. There were also the common pastures and untilled wastes where the livestock grazed.

The complex soil pattern of north Shropshire with small areas of light, easily cultivated soils separated by stretches of heavy often ill-drained land probably carrying dense forest, almost certainly accounts for the large number and relatively small size of the manors recorded in the Domesday survey. Almost all the manors recorded are traceable and except for a very small number are situated on soils now described as brown earths. The few exceptions are situated on heavy textured less well drained soils lying adjacent to lighter land on which the open fields were doubtless situated.

North Shropshire does not seem to have been heavily forested at this time as only nineteen manors are recorded as having a wood which supplied mast for swine. The woods grew on the heavier moist fertile soils for example on the Salop series at Myddle, Hadnall, Wem and Sleaf Magna, on the Lilleshall series at High Ercall, on the Hodnet series at Hodnet and on the Cegin series at Forton and Merrington. (See appendix 3)

Much of the waste land was either under heath or very open scrub woodland or consisted of swampy ground close to the streams. It is likely that the effects of persistent grazing and especially the grubbing of the various pigs would tend to prevent regeneration of many woodland species, causing the proportion of timber to decrease continually.

Medieval practices

Agricultural practices on the early medieval manors were fairly uniform and continued without much change for several centuries. The apparent haphazard arrangement of fields, fences and roads and villages has some definite cause and origin. The causes are mainly agricultural as from Roman times until about one hundred and fifty years ago the people of this county were dependent upon agriculture. Agriculture has had as much direct influence

on the course and layout of the roads as transport and communications.² Much of the cultivation of the time was carried on under the open field system, usually the three field system. With this most of the land available for cultivation is divided into three parts and a rotation of crops is followed. The fields were divided into shots or furlongs and then subdivided into strips. These strips were called butts in Shropshire. One of the chief variations in Shropshire seems to have been in the size of an acre. The only reference the same as the rest of the country to the exact size was a twelfth century mention measuring forty perches by four – a perch being twenty four feet. The usual width of the ancient plough butts in Shropshire was sixteen yards or two Shropshire linear roods of twenty four feet each. Ploughing consisted of alternating gatherings and castings, i.e. starting on the outside of the Butt and finishing in the middle. In the three years of the rotation there are three gatherings or ploughing to the centre and one casting or ploughing to the outside. In time the butt became raised in the middle and sloped gradually into deep hollows between them. Very little was known about manuring but some marling was carried out on the lighter soils although the most widespread development of this operation belongs to a later period. Sheep were prized for their wool and cattle mainly for their milk, oxen were used for draught and pigs were probably the main source of meat.

The years between 1086 and the beginning of the fourteenth century saw very little change in the way of life and the size of the manors seems to have remained remarkably constant. Here and there several smaller manors became amalgamated under one lord while elsewhere the abbeys tended to increase a little, sometimes at the expense of certain manors.

The Black Death in 1348- 49 so reduced the population that it was difficult to maintain the cultivation of the land and the tendency to pay wages for the service on the lord's demesne, which had begun in the twelfth century was accentuated by the scarcity of labour. Some land was left untilled and other portions were leased to tenants. (See appendix 4)

Early 17th Century

The Manor of Myddle was owned by the family of Lords Strange but in the reign of Henry VII after over 400 years there was no male issue, and the daughter, Joan, was married to Sir George Stanley. After the Stanley's had been owners for about 110 years, they sold it to the Lord Keeper Egerton. This purchase was made in 1600. (See figure 8)³ It was probably as a safe investment of the profits of office that made Egerton buy the Ellesmere estate not as a residence. His son John found the expenses of the first Earl of Bridgewater heavy, so strenuous efforts were made to increase the revenue obtained from the estate. The outbreak of war in 1642 prevented the completion of the releasing on the Ellesmere manor which began in 1637 and the next four years must have involved the earl in heavy financial losses. In Myddle, certain leases were surrendered which William of Derby had wrongfully granted in the lifetime of his mother. Egerton, says Gough, required these leases to be

² Slack. "The open field system in Shropshire"

³ E. Hopkins "The Bridgewater Estates in North Shropshire in the Early 17th Century

given up and on their surrender new leases on easy terms were granted.⁴ Four tenants refused to surrender, but their leases were never questioned in law.

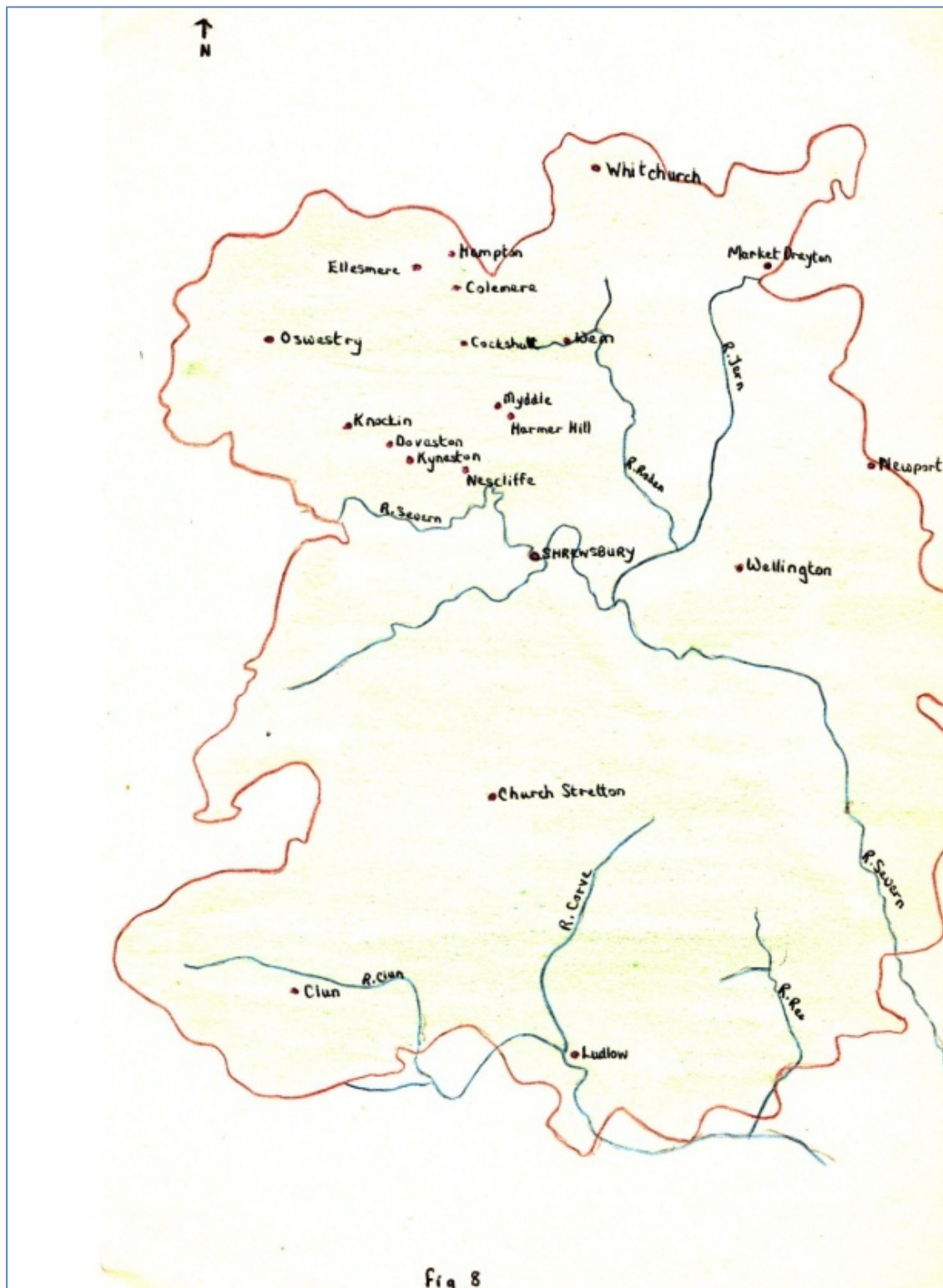


Figure 8

⁴ Richard Gough "The History and Antiquities of Myddle 1700 – 1701"

In addition to the smaller leases which were in effect there were three important leases⁵ all of which were assigned to trustees for Egerton in February and June 1600. The first lease was for an estate possessed by Baptist Hicks in Myddle, Nescliffe and Nestrangle which estate he transferred in February 1600 to Thomas Chamberlain and William Brooke. The second lease was for seventy years in Dovaston, Kynaston, Knockin, Myddle, Nestrangle and Nescliffe, the leasees being George Earl of Cumberland and Thomas Ireland. This lease was assigned by them to Chamberlain and Brook in June 1600. The last lease was for 80 years if Elizabeth, Countess of Derby (wife of the sixth Earl of Derby) lived as long, in Ellesmere, Myddle, Knockin, Nestrangle, Nesscliff, Dovaston and Kynaston. The leasees Edward Earl of Oxford and Sir Robert Cecil assigned their interest to Chamberlain and Brock in June 1600. These men had acted as middlemen in the sale of the estate between the Earl of Derby and Sir Thomas Egerton.

Egerton was careful to have all leases of any length and importance transferred either to him or to trustees. In order to settle finally the whole matter of the descent of the Derby properties to William and to confirm the scale to Egerton of the Shropshire properties, including the Ellesmere estates, a private act of parliament was passed in 1606. The title to the Advowson of the Rectory of Myddle was acquired from Arthur Chamber on 6th January 1610. This gentleman lived in Petton.

Although the principal sum paid for the estate is £7400 the cost of clearing off the incumbrance is unknown. There was the bargain and sale, the acquisition by Egerton of leases in the property in existence before purchases and the strengthening of his title by releases of all claims by the Stanleys and the private Act, and lastly subsidiary purchases. Myddle was an important manor and was subject to the further lease owned by Cumberland and Ireland and so was Knockin.

Revenues of the Estate

Two years after Egerton bought the Ellesmere estate a survey of them was carried out by four commissioners, Richard Barker, Sir Thomas Chamberlain, Robert Calcott and Thomas Charlton.⁶ The survey gives a detailed description of the title by which each tenant held the land together with the rent due and the fine paid. The total number of tenants in 1602 was two hundred and seventy two. Of these 115 were tenants for three lives paying rents of small sums mostly under £1, which totalled £67-12-7. The fines paid were commonly between £2 and £10 and in sum amounted to £347-13-3. The largest number of tenants of this kind were in Myddle, where thirty two tenants paid £24-14-0 in rents in a year and together paid fines of £134-18-4 including one of £50. Tenure in the Ellesmere was for three lives, two lives, 21 years and miscellaneous classes of tenants for one life or terms shorter than 21 years. Between 1572-1593 tenure was mainly for three lives with a smaller number for two lives and less than a quarter for 21 years.

The 1602 survey has remarkably few references to either freeholders or copy holders. The principal reference to freeholders are contained in the first few pages of the survey where it is recorded that eight free tenants of Myddle owe suit of court, but have defaulted in their holding.

⁵ Box – Ellesmere Estate Documents, Deeds 1 and 17

⁶ Box. Ellesmere Estate Documents. The 1602 Survey

Type of Holding

⁷The fact that acreages are not given for the most part in the 1602 survey makes it difficult to provide exact information as to the type of holding. There are however figures available for Ellesmere and Myddle which makes it possible to say that these holdings varied from a cottage rented at a few pence a year to farms for which several pounds a year were paid. Holdings of between five and ten acres were common in both Ellesmere and Myddle. The average rent paid per acre in Ellesmere was 8d both for grants and three lives and grants for twenty one years. In Myddle, the usual rent an acre was higher, one shilling, but many of the entries relate to new enclosures from the waste of Myddlewood or Brandwood. If the figures of 8d and one shilling an acre are taken as a guide, it is clear from the rents of the remaining townships that as in Ellesmere and Myddle the average farm was between five and ten acres.

⁸The description of these holdings varies a great deal. In some cases a tenants land is described briefly as a 'messuage' or 'a messuage or tenement' neither of which description gives much away. At other times, the reference is to parcels of land which are named e.g. Crossfield or to parcels in places which are named e.g. 4 acres enclosed from the waste called Myddlewood. Field names are often mentioned, e.g. Windmill Field. Reference to lands enclosed either in named fields or from the waste are common. In Myddle a good deal of enclosure of the waste called Brandwood and the waste called Myddlewood had taken place.

It is evident that enclosure from the waste was to be met with on all sides throughout the estates. At the beginning of the 1602 survey is a list of presentments for Ellesmere, Kenwickwood and Cockshutt consisting merely of presentments for encroachments. Halfway through the survey the details are given of an agreement between Egerton and Sir Thomas Hanmer and his son regarding encroachments. The latter acknowledged Sir Thomas Egerton as Lord of the Manor of Hampton and Colemere and says encroachment and improvements would be acknowledged at the next court to a reasonable rent to be agreed upon. Five freeholders of Myddle acknowledged their holdings of woodland in Myddle and were generally prepared to pay for it at the rate of one shilling an acre.

⁹In the presence of so much enclosure from the waste it seems unlikely that the exchange and consolidation of strips on the common fields was not far advanced by 1600. The wording of the description of the holdings is not sufficiently informative to make it clear how many open field farmings remained but the fact that too many of the tenants held their land in one compact holding seems to point to the desuetude of strip farming. In Myddle about half of the tenants held single tenements while the rest had two or more parcels of land, often the additional parcels being quantities of waste. It seems that compact holdings were common on the Ellesmere estate by 1602 and that considerable progress had been made towards a modern system of tenant farming based upon short term agreements of about twenty one year's duration. The open fields had largely disappeared in the Ellesmere group of manors by 1600, Knockin being the one area where open field cultivation was still employed. The changes which were to take place in the century that followed were

⁷ Box. Ellesmere Estate Documents. The 1602 Survey

⁸ E. Hopkins. The Bridgewater Estates in the North Shropshire in the Early Seventeenth Century

⁹ E. Hopkins

therefore concerned with enclosure from the waste rather than the enclosure of open fields. There was no great change in the number of tenants in the manor of Myddle – 41 in 1602 and 50 in 1637. The amount of rent for the estate was £327-3-1 in 1637 and it had only been £246-17-0 in 1602. The increase was largely due to significant trends in rents during the period. It was caused by the new practice of demanding improved rents principally in Knockin and Myddle. In Myddle the number of tenants had increased from 41 to 50 but the increase in rents payable from £34-7-7 to £55-2-0 is largely due once more to improved rents.

1637 survey

In the 1637 survey, Myddle's holdings again ranged from cottages with yards to a grant of about twenty acres of pasture or wood. Generally speaking rents other than improved rents were still at the old rate of one shilling an old acre, or sixpence a statutory acre. The most significant change between 1602 and 1637 was that of the improvements of rents. Tenants were not confined to simply mixed farming dependent on crops of wheat, barley and rye and the raising of cattle. Thomas Hodgkins of Myddle was one of several who rented conny greaves costing £5 a year. It seems likely that the Ellesmere tenants formed a prosperous agricultural community before the Civil War.

William Brayne of Myddle refused to fine or pay an increase of any kind under the 1637 survey. In the case of Bartholomew Piers of Myddle who intended to stand on the validity of his lease if his offer of a fine was not accepted, the Commissioners neatly avoided any difficulty which might arise by holding the lease forfeit for assignment without a license. Thomas Gueste of Myddle had an offer of £48 refused and £2 to Lord Brackly. The land was let to him at £7 for one year as compared with the £1 paid previously. There is an occasional tenant who offered a yearly rent as an alternative to his offer of a fine, such as William Cleaton of Myddle. He offered £160 and £5 and his old rent of £1-13-4 for his messuage and tenement called the Hollins or alternatively a rent of £18 a year.

Undoubtedly the fines offered in 1637 were very much greater than those of 1602. In the earlier year the majority of fines which had been paid when the survey was taken were well under £10 and no gratuities are mentioned at all. In 1637 it was common to find fines of between £50 and £100. Thomas Newnes offered £200 for a messuage and tenement in Newton. This and other figures like it are in marked contrast to the small sums offered at the beginning of the century. In view of this substantial increase the survey has evidence of competition for new leases and of tenants increasing their first offers on better consideration. The Earl, in fact, was not likely to be content with anything less than what he considered his due.

The death of the Countess Alice in 1636 made it possible for the Commissioners to re-lease the Ellesmere, Myddle and Knockin estates. What instructions were given to the Commissioners and to what extent they were excessive in their demands is not known but there were cases of widespread protests. In the typical case, the Earl's representative seems to have been content to have merely set down the offer made for their master's decision and presumably this together with the inspection of titles formed their main task. Little variation in the form of grant allowed is apparent. Twenty one year leases had almost disappeared and so had the grants for less than three lives. In the typical case, the Earl's representative seems to have been content to have merely set down the offer made for their

master's decision and presumably this together with the inspection of titles formed their main task. Little variation in the form of grant allowed is apparent. Twenty one year leases had almost disappeared and so had the grants for less than three lives.

When the properties were surveyed again in 1638 the tenants who had made their offers in the previous year were asked to offer still more. From the nature of the entries¹⁰ it is apparent that the procedure followed by the Commissioners was similar to that employed by them a few months earlier – that is they were looking for an offer for a fine which if of a satisfactory nature would be recorded for the Earl's decision or if it were too small it would be rejected in favour of an improved rent. A number of tenants could not even pay their August offers and so had to take an improved rent. Others could pay their former offers but no more. Stephen Fourmaston of Myddle had offered £60 and £3 as a gratuity in the previous year but would make no further offer. "I demanded £100 but could draw him no higher." John Charlton. Thomas Asterley also of Myddle paid the penalty for his outspokenness "he offered £20 which I refused for abuse which he offered." There remain certain tenants who were determined to stand by the leases granted them in earlier years such as Andrew Hordley of Myddle who could not be improved because of his lease. Less than half the tenants who made offers in 1637 found it possible to improve those offers sufficiently enough to satisfy the Commissioners in 1638. The Commissioners demanded a substantial increase, about 10%, if the new offer was to stand a chance of acceptance.

The 1642 State of Fines¹¹ contains a list of eighty five tenants. For each one the amount of fines offered is noted together with how much has been paid off and how much is outstanding. A closer examination of the individual entries show that this is something more than a summary of the extent to which the 1638 offers had been paid by 1642. Some fines mentioned are substantially higher than the offer made in 1638. Janet Clowes of Myddle originally offered £265 and £10. By 1642 she has paid £272-6-8 off a fine which had been increased to £320. Only very occasionally are fines mentioned which are less than those offered in 1638.

¹²From the evidence collected it appears that the Commissioners continued to seek fines in return for leases rather than rack rents. By 1642 fines had been largely substituted for the rents of 1638. The 1638 offers were improved where possible and new offers demanded even when earlier offers had been refused. The re-leasing of the estates which was begun in 1637 was not completed by 1638.

Changes between 1602 and 1642 were of some enclosure of waste, the growth of rack rents on new enclosures, the re-leasing of farms on payment of greatly increased fines and the temporary imposition of rack rents where the terms of new leases could not be agreed upon immediately. The increase in fines and rack rents are striking and although the reasons for these increases cannot be stated with any degree of finality they provide a clear enough indication of the prosperity of the time. If agriculture had been suffering from depressions it seems unlikely that such large sums of money would have been available and that competition for holdings would have occurred.

¹⁰ E Hopkins

¹¹ Box Ellesmere Manor rentals "State of fines from Note of the Accompts for Fynes in Ellesmere in the county of Salop as they stande. 28th August 1641. Revised 4th December

¹² E Hopkins

Administration of the estates

The owner, the first Earl of Bridgewater is not mentioned in the chief accounts of Ellesmere estates and this offers a clue to the manner in which the estate was administered. In view of the Earl's retirement in Ashbridge, his estate near London, during the fighting of the Civil War the administration of the estates was slack. The maintenance of regular communications must have proved very difficult over such a distance and the safe transferring of sums of money hazardous. In such circumstances the only possible thing to do was to allow the granting of new leases, the eviction of unsatisfactory tenants, collection of rents and all the work entailed in running the estates to stand over for the time being, and this is what happened for at least four years. The rents were collected during the years of fighting and thereafter were collected only sporadically for the next two years. If the rents were unpaid so were the amounts owing in respect of fines. There is no mention anywhere in the 1650 survey of any payment of either kind for the years 1643, 1644 and 1645 and only one or two for 1646, so that it was not until 1647 that any effort was made to begin the collection of money owing from tenants and much still remained to be done by 1650. The war, however, had often brought hard times to the tenants. This much might be surmised from the general history of the war in North Shropshire for continual small scale skirmishing, together with the interruption in trade must inevitably have disorganised farming in the area and this impression is confirmed by the references to the war and by the relative poverty of tenants in 1650. If the tenants were hard hit so was the owner of the estates. The Earl was deprived of both rent and fine for a number of years and the driving up of fines was brought to an abrupt end in 1642. From a short term point of view neither the owner of the estates or the tenants seemed to profit financially from the Civil Wars whatever their ultimate gains politically and economic may be thought to have been.

After the Civil War

Although few documents have survived for the period immediately following 1645 to about 1650 there are a number of bailiff's accounts recording in detail the arrears which accumulated since the beginning of the war. The work of collecting arrears of rents and fines began in earnest. The war could not have come at a more inconvenient time in the Ellesmere manors, for in 1642 the business of bargaining for new fines was still unconcluded and there still remained over £2,220 to be collected. When the collectors began their work again the emphasis was placed on bringing in these fines, rents being of lesser importance for the time being. The results of the first attempts to collect arrears may be seen in the earliest and most informative of the bailiff's accounts.¹³ The total of fines received was £2,072-11-4 a substantial figure when compared with £2,221-9-8 owing at the beginning of the war. Rents collected amounted to £845-11-6 though this does not include Myddle, Knockin or Ness which are omitted entirely from the list of rents received (but not of fines received). Perhaps it was thought better to deal with Myddle separately for the arrears of rent there were large amounting to £777-6-7 in 1649¹⁴. (see fig 9a and 9b below)

In 1650 the fields of the manor of Myddle were large which suggests that some enclosure or consolidation had taken place. At this time many of the leases for three lives resulting from

¹³ The accounts of money received from fines and income within the several Lordships of Ellesmere Myddle and Knockin from 12th July 1642 until 1648 (Box Ellesmere Manor Rentals)

¹⁴ Arrears of Rent in Mr. Gittens Accounts for Myddle 1641-49 (Box Whitchurch rentals)

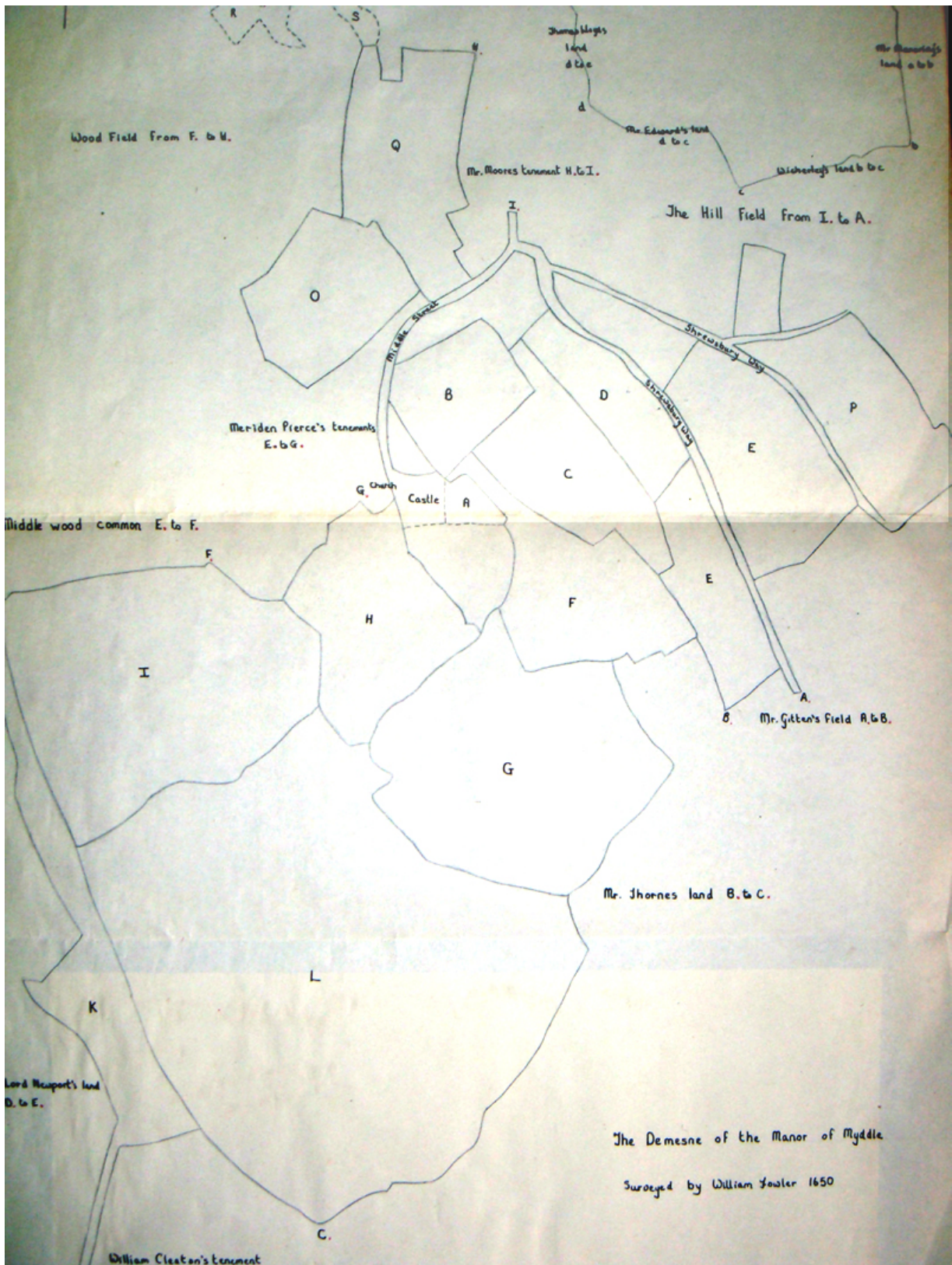


Fig 9 (a) The Demesne of the Manor of Myddle Surveyed by William Fowler 1650

<u>The Demesne of Myddle 1650</u>			
	<u>a</u>	<u>r</u>	<u>p</u>
A The house and homestead	1	1	30
B The -ddy Croft	8	0	39
C The Rough -ddy Crofts	11	3	9
D Lower Bromy heasows	6	2	36
E The Way heasows	8	1	4
F The Moore	15	0	18
G The Higher Rough Ground	33	2	6
H The - heasows	15	2	29
I The Upper Parks	37	3	20
K The Kirck land	15	2	29
L The Parks Croft	94	0	21
M The Hill heasows	15	0	15
N - Moor	36	0	23
O The Wheat Hill Croft	12	0	0
P A furlong in hill field	16	1	22
Q A furlong in Wood field	15	3	34
R A pole of meadow in wood field	1	3	6
S A pole of meadow in wood field	1	0	0
<u>Surveyed by William Fowler 1650</u>			

Fig 9 (b) The Demesne of the Manor of Myddle Surveyed by William Fowler 1650

bargaining were still in existence. Consequently the competition for leases and the driving up of fines which characterised the years before the outbreak of War were absent from the post war period. The tenants who were approached in 1650 were either those who had previously failed to offer enough pre-war and had, therefore, been rack rented (used to mean full economic rent as opposed to the small reserved rent payable under a lease for which a fine had been paid) or those few who had paid their fines and had received their leases but now found themselves through some misfortune with only one life left under the term of the lease. They were out to get the maximum from the estates either in fines or in rack rents. The Earl seemed to prefer 21 year leases to leases for lives because they offered a fixed rent for a fixed period at a time when the trend of prices and rents appeared uncertain. The Earl was anxious to get rid of unsatisfactory tenants and to increase the revenue as far as possible. (See appendix 5).

There was no kind of survey for the period 1650-1660. There are no rentals for Myddle for 1657, 1658, 1659 and 1660 but the other years were as follows¹⁵.

1650	£156.11.4
1651	£181.13.3
1652	£179.13.3
1653	£206.2.10
1654	£205.15.4
1655	£197.10.7
1656	£197.1.4
1661	214.19.2

There is no great change though an increase did take place between 1652 and 1653 due to an improvement in rents in Newton. The sums paid for rents would appear to indicate that no major variation in administration policy occurred during 1650-60. The greatest number of leases were issued in 1651 when the commissioners were still making compositions with the tenants. By 1661 the Ellesmere group of manors had once more been put into good working order and the administrative machine was working smoothly. By this time Myddle had been separated from the other Derby lands for administrative convenience and included in the charge of the bailiff for the Whitchurch properties.

In 1662 a survey¹⁶ was made of the land in the possession of Henry Chambers and Elyz Stitnate. (see appendix 6). The lands surveyed belonged to the Earl of Bridgewater but why the survey was made is not known. Leases of land from the Earl in the 1680s seem to have been mainly for a life or ninety nine years. Some of the leases were given in return for the surrender of former leases which still had time left. In February 1683 the Earl of Bridgewater gave a lease of land for ninety nine years to Samuel Formaston in return for the surrender of a former lease which still had two lives left. The yearly rent was still just over a shilling an acre¹⁷. The tenants had to do certain services for the Lord. For disagreements about boundaries see Appendix 7.

In the early 1730s there was a disagreement between the Duke of Bridgewater (appellant) and Sir Frances Edwards (respondent) over the payment of rent for a piece of land (see

¹⁵ Myddle Manors rentals and rent accounts. Box Bridgewater Collection

¹⁶ Myddle Manor Bridgewater Collection Box

¹⁷ Box Myddle Manor Bridgewater Collection; Leases

appendix 8). The Duke said he owned the land so Sir Frances Edwards should pay seven shillings a year for certain lands in the township of Houlston. Edwards said his ancestors nor himself had paid rent to the Duke. The case was dismissed in favour of Sir Frances Edwards, but then the Duke appealed hoping the decision would be reversed.

There are cases of two people exchanging land and it seems reasonable to assume from this that they are trying to consolidate their holdings. William and Peter Shingler¹⁸ first buy eighty one acres of land which lies in Houlston township from Lord Berwick for £1750. The two brothers exchange land in 1807. William gives 40 acres, 31 perches and £150 in exchange to Peter for 40 acres 3 roods 1 perch. Next William receives the Warwick field in exchange from Peter for the Long Field and Middle Field purchases by W. Shingler from Mr. Lloyd's trustees. No money passed in this exchange. William Shingler made a number of purchases of land from Lord Berwick, Mr. P. Shingler, Mr. Lloyd, Mr W. Jeffrey's trustees. William Shingler then exchanged land with the Earl of Bridgewater (see fig. 10 and appendix 9).

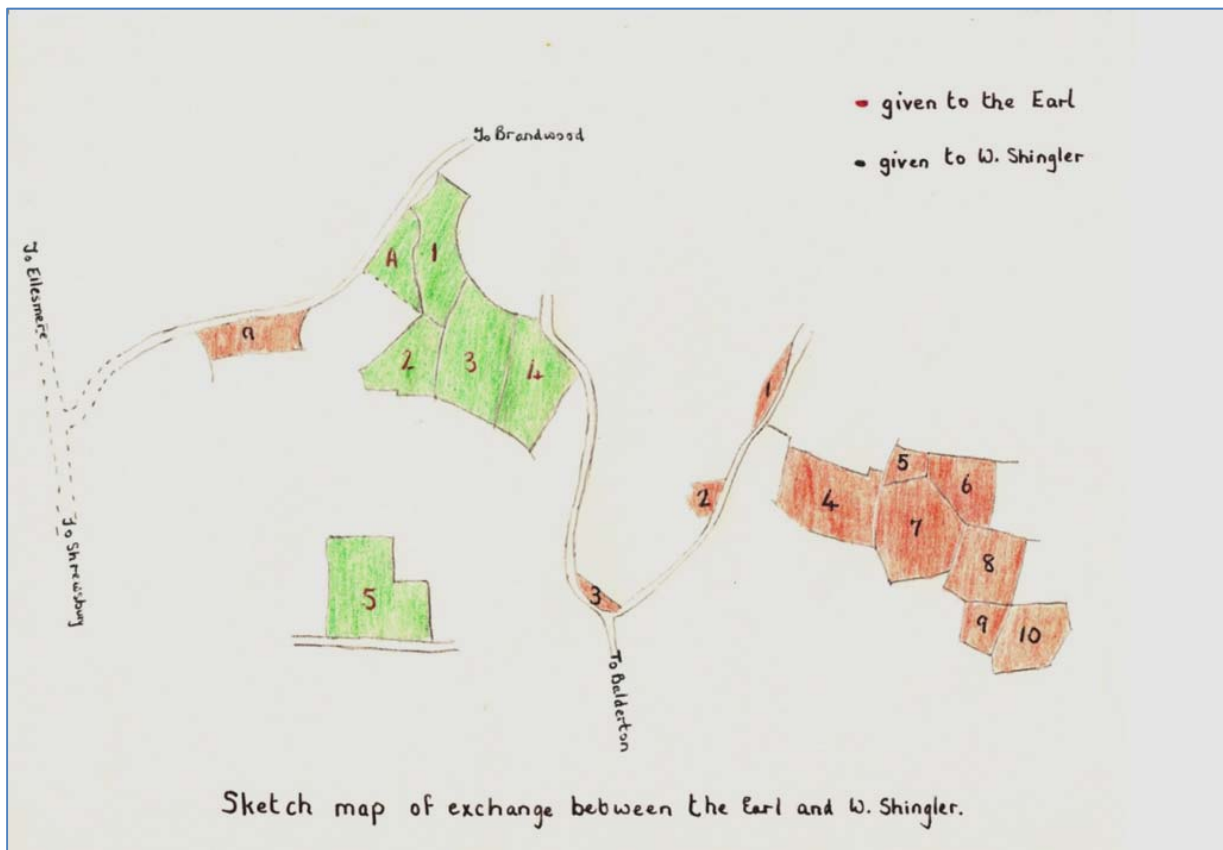


Figure 10. Sketch map of exchange between the Earl and W. Shingler

Enclosure was a slow and erratic process of reclaiming forest or waste rather than subdivision of the open arable fields and it appears to have begun quite early according to Celtic tribal custom. There are undoubtedly some medieval enclosure of tilled land and the long narrow fields with curved edges around Little Ness are a clear evidence of this. Generally, however, farms and farm land was carved out of the forest in small areas by

¹⁸ Box Myddle Manor Bridgewater Estate Leases

single family efforts. The process appears to have reached its peak in the middle of the eighteenth century by which time only the poorer commons and marshland remained open. As a rule enclosure resulted in the establishment of colonies of farms of varying size and involving no violent social disturbance. Where large areas were involved the invariable result was to dispossess numerous peasants who then tended to congregate in the wilder and unwanted places – the bogs, and heaths. Local tradition makes Whixhall a gathering place for refugees.

Until the middle of the eighteenth century there were few technical changes. Livestock probably improved to some extent and the county is said to have acquired a reputation for high quality cheese. In the eighteenth century Myddle was an area noted for barley¹⁹. As regards livestock cows were often given as heriots, and their value varied between £1 and £3. Oxen were also given but never sheep, probably because of their much smaller value. In fact sheep received hardly any reference at all in the documents though it is to be supposed that some farmers kept small flocks. Gough goes on to say 'there is good stoare of sheep in this parish whose wool if washed white and well-ordered is not much inferior to the wool of Baschurch and Ness which bears the name of the best in the county'. There was some marling and some lime and soot were used in addition to dung, but underground drainage was not practiced until the great era of farm development when 'Farmer George' was King.

The eighteenth century brought decided improvements for the growth of overseas trade and an increase in population produced a general increase in prosperity and a growing demand for food in the towns. Improved implements began to appear including differing ploughs for different soils, drainage was beginning, the suitability of certain varieties of crops for certain areas was realized as new crops such as turnips, clover and grasses began to make their contribution.

The development of industry in East Shropshire and adjacent counties in this century further increased the demand for local agricultural produce and stimulated the progress in farming which had become apparent. Under the inspiration of such men as Jethro Tull and Lord Townshend the art of mixed husbandry was being mastered while Robert Bakewell was beginning to improve livestock by the selective breeding which was to contribute so much to the world's agriculture.

²⁰ Although Shropshire had been rather backward in its agriculture in the sixteenth century, it seems to have been in the forefront in the eighteenth. The comparatively early and apparently peaceful enclosure of the open fields made possible the adoption of every new technique in husbandry and stock breeding. Though in 1776 fertilizers were still limited to lime, marl, soot and dung, the lime was used extensively and produced very obvious responses, especially on the lighter soils. Marling was less common than formerly but was still practised around Preston Brockhurst.

Very broadly it may be said that the enclosures of the eighteenth century completed the reclamation of all readily cultivatable land. There remained considerable areas of poor sandy heath barely worth reclaiming at the level of prices then ruling. Some of these

¹⁹ Gough's History and Antiquities of Myddle

²⁰ E Cropmton and D A Osmond (HMSO 1954)

became subjects of parliamentary enclosure especially during the two decades 1800 – 1820 and during the Hungry Forties. The majority of the commons enclosed in the nineteenth century were on the light soils now described as the Crannymoor series and the new methods of tile drainage developed in the first half of the century and the use of lime allowed more diverse use to be made of the heavier soils.

There were only five Acts passed for enclosure of open fields in Shropshire. The area concerned amounted to 3% of the total county acreage of 852,000 acres. No enclosure related to Shropshire took place under the general Act of 1836, the Amending Act of 1840 or the General Act of 1845. Of the five acts, one passed in 1807 provided for the enclosure of 640 acres in Knockin but the township of Bridgewater estates are not mentioned otherwise. Acts for the enclosure of waste are much more numerous there being forty nine passed 1763 – 1839, one being for the enclosure of 270 acres in Myddle. W E Tate²¹ said 'Much commonable waste was enclosed by non-parliamentary means such as through a process known as agreement' and 'Plymley is certainly wrong in suggesting that there was much enclosure being carried out by act'.

²²In 1807, the 47th year of the reign of George III, an act of parliament was passed for the enclosure of Commons and waste lands in Myddlewood, Myddle Hill, Witherage Green, or Balderton Green, Haremere Hill and Marton Common in all about 270 acres, which was probably due to the French Wars. John Earl of Bridgewater was Lord of the Manor of Myddle. He together with Samuel Slaneforth, Richard Atcherley, Richard Bickerton, William Shingler, Edward Edwards and others were owners of land within the parish and manor, so were entitled to a right of common in the previously mentioned wastes. Henry Bowman of Knockin was appointed commissioner for surveying, dividing, allotting and inclosing the land. He was also responsible for an Act of Parliament passed in 1801 which consolidated into one Act certain provisions usually inserted in the Acts of enclosure. He was to set out several public and private roads and highways over the waste lands which was to be of several breadths and to be repaired by persons in the manner set down by the Act (see appendix 10). The commissioner was then to award the land to the freeholders and people who had right of common on those to be enclosed. For the land to be enclosed see fig 11. (see below) He was to order the fences of the roads and allotments were to be made by the respective people. They were to be planted with Quicksets and then the fences of the Allotments should be double railed and secured from cattle at their expense and the hedges and ditches thus made should be maintained and kept in repair. If any disputes arose the commissioner was authorised and required to examine the dispute. If anyone was dissatisfied with the determination of the Commissioner, he could proceed to a trial at law as long as it was made within six months. If encroachments have been made within the twenty years previous to passing the act without legal sanction the land would be deemed to belong to the Earl.

The commissioner first allotted to the Earl of Bridgewater (over and above the others) in lieu of his rights of common, one fourteenth part in value of the unenclosed lands in compensation. No sheep or lambs were to be kept on the new enclosures by virtue of the

²¹ W E Tate; Shropshire Archaeological Society; 'Four centuries of Agriculture in Shropshire' 4th Series volume 32 (1947)

²² Box Myddle Manor Bridgewater Estate

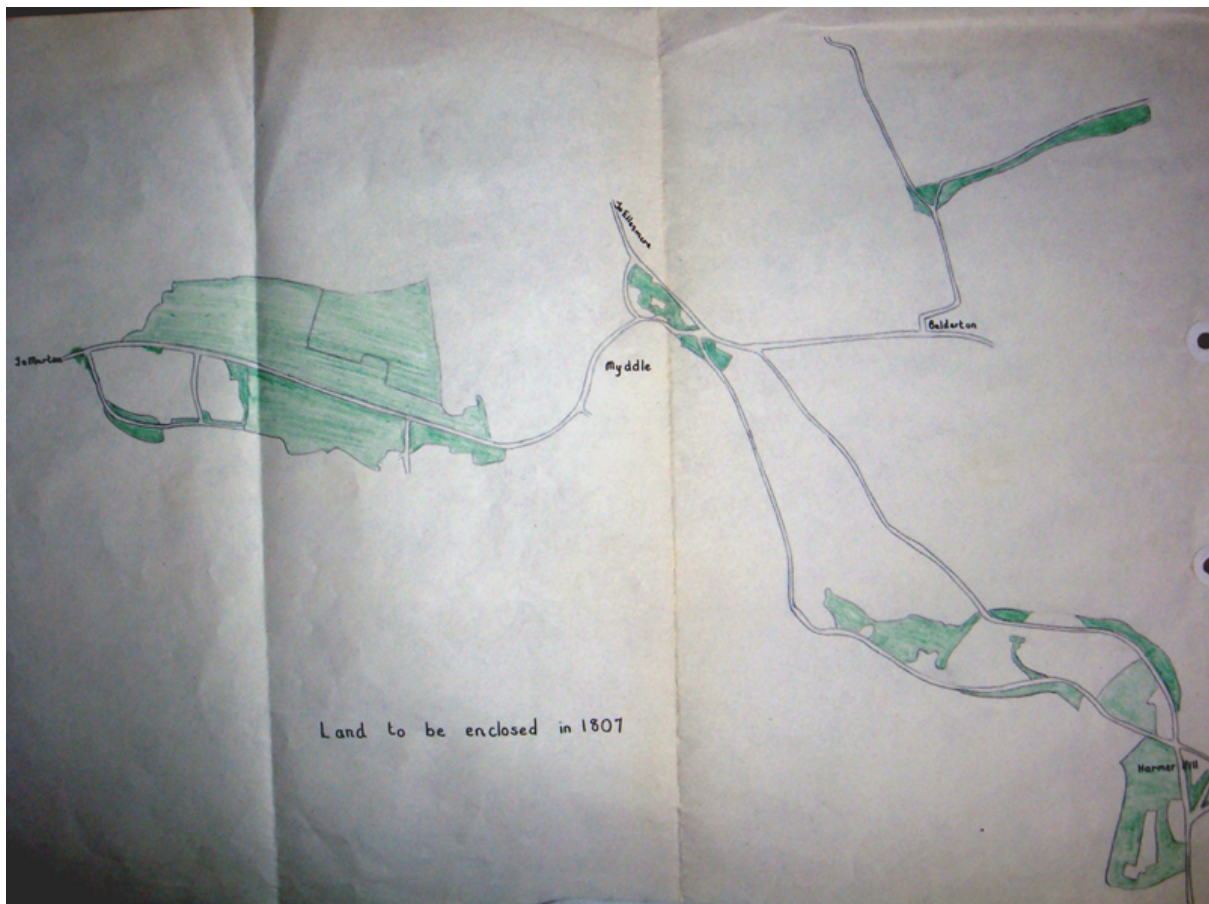


Fig 11 Land to be enclosed in 1807

Act for the first seven years unless the person keeping the sheep should fence his land with Quicksets to prevent damage. It was lawful for the commissioner to set out and reward any lands, tenements or Hereditanments whatsoever within the parish of Myddle in lieu of and in exchange for any other lands provided that such exchanges be ascertained and declared in the award of the commissioner (see appendix 10a). No exchange was to be made for any lands held in the right of the church, chapel or other ecclesiastical benefice.

The Charges and Expenses involving in obtaining and passing of the act of surveying, planning, valuing, dividing, allotting and the preparation of the award, payment of the Commissioner and his expenses were to be paid by the proprietors interested in the mentioned wastes.

The most typical form of tenancy through the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was the lease of three lives with the obligation of carrying out all repairs lying squarely on the tenant. In the late eighteenth century long leases were going out of favour as it was said that the tenant frequently exhausted the farm during the last four years.

‘The grass lands for hay was seldom manured except for one field next to the house’ said Bishton²³. He said that the cattle in north Shropshire were an inferior sort of Lancashire Long Horn mainly for dairying. The produce was sold mainly in the manufacturing towns.

²³ J. Bishton. General View of Agriculture in Shropshire (Board of Agriculture 1794)

He believed that the large majority of Shropshire farmers of the time were bad cultivators and so the improvements he suggested were not the same as in other parts of the country. He suggested a fallow course – dividing the arable land into four parts – for wheat, turnips, barley and clover. He made a number of other suggestions for different types of soil. In particular he believed that pastures should be mowed every year and manured in the autumn of every second year.

²⁴Plymley said that the size of both estates and farms in Shropshire were various – there are estates of noblemen and several commoners 10,000 to 25,000 acres each while there are an infinite number of freeholders and yeomen's estates of all inferior size and the farms varied from 100 to 500 acres on the east side of the county to as little as 20 acres on the borders of Wales. There was much copyhold tenure. It was hereditary tenure either to the youngest or the eldest son. Wages were about seven shillings a week for constant labourers, with two shillings extra at harvest time and 1/6 a day for a good man. An allowance of beer was made which was 3 quarts in the winter and 4 quarts in the summer.

²⁵Arthur Young, on his tour, found that in the Myddle, Petton area, most cottagers and farmers had hemp, which they spun and wove into cloth. Potatoes were planted in the garden and on the headlands. As to manuring, lime was a great resource. They laid a wagon load an acre and put it on the fallow before the wheat. It was found not to be as successful on strong wet land as on light land. It was spread every four years. Dairies were quite large – up to 35 cows. The cows had one and a half acres of grass for summer food, in winter were fed on barley straw, but before and after calving, hay. They reared most of the calves they had and they weaned at three weeks. Sheep were kept in small parcels and in every year, and sold fat. They bought year olds at 7/- to 9/-. A plough with a team of four horses could keep nearly 100 acres arable. The depth was about 4 inches and the price was 5/- an acre. 'The price of labour in the last 20 years has risen by half', said A Young.

In 1836 the Tithe Commutation Act was passed. It substituted a cash rent – charge for the tithes taken in kind. The payment of tithes of the produce of the land to the Church, in its origins a moral obligation on all Christians had been made a legal charge by King Edgar in 970. By the nineteenth century its collection in kind by the parson was a long-standing anachronism. The Act substituted annual cash payment, a rent charge based on the average prices of wheat, barley and oats in the previous seven years. Though the commutation of an irksome practice operated on the whole to the advantage of all parties, it created difficulties in times of sharply falling prices, during which the time lag in the downward adjustment of the seven-year average maintained the rent-charge at levels much higher than current corn prices. In Myddle a tithe map was made in 1839,²⁶ which was of the whole parish. From this the field names are given. The gross rent charge was £1,100 and this was worked out from the average price of cereals which were wheat 1044.5, barley 1852.6 and oats 2666.7. The owner of most of the parish at this time was the Countess of Bridgewater. From this map a comparison was made by the local historians with earlier records and it is almost certain that the farm Newton House, was the home of Richard Gough the historian of the early 18th century. (See fig 12)

²⁴ J Plymley; General View of Agriculture in Shropshire (Board of Agriculture 1801)

²⁵ A Young; Tours in England and Wales Page 162 - 168

²⁶ London Tythe Redemption Office – a copy

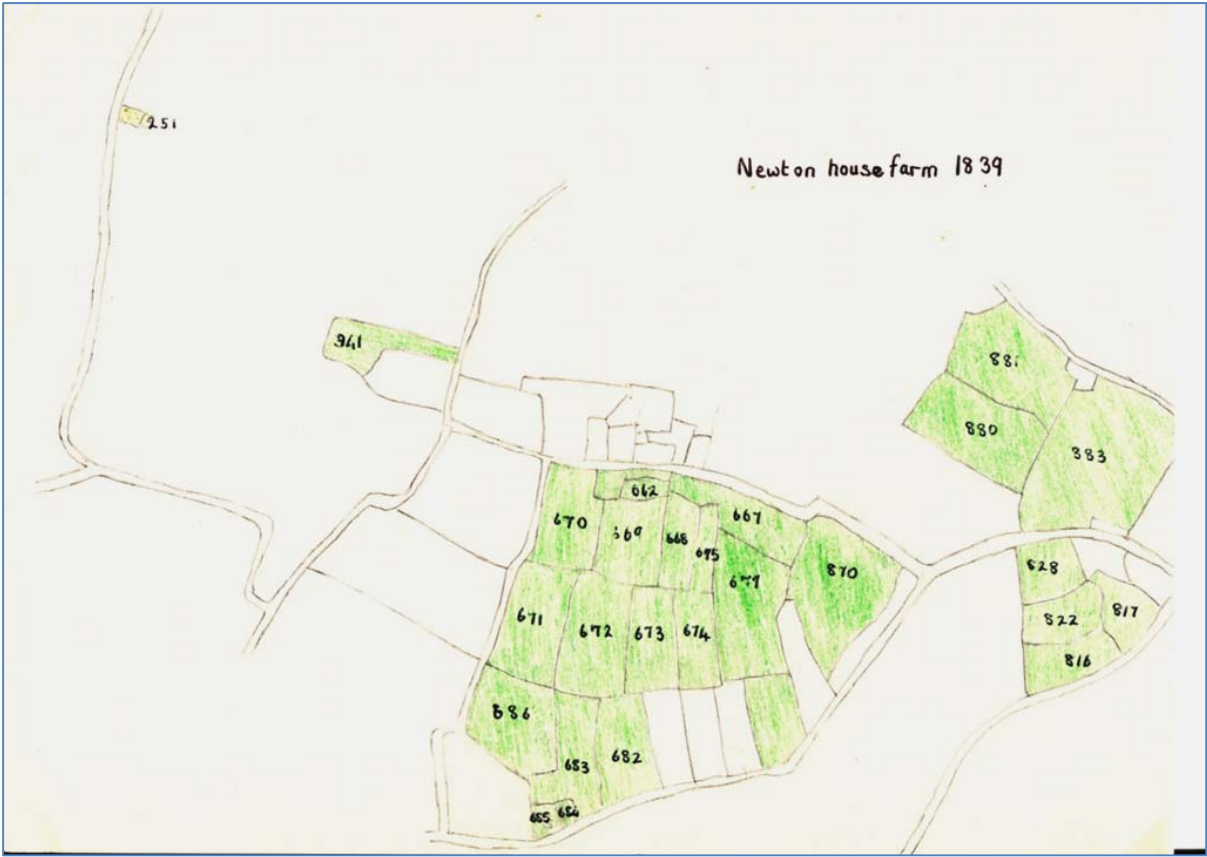


Fig 12 Newton House Farm 1839

<u>Land at Newton on the Hill owned in 1833 by Richard Palin Bickerton</u> <u>and occupied by William Bickerton</u>			a	r	p
361	Birch Croft	Mown	3	1	4
662	House, Buildings, Gardens,		2	1	17
667	House and Gardens	Potatoes		3	6
668	Calves Croft	Old Pasture	2	3	5
669	Gorsy Croft	Old Pasture	4	3	30
670	Barn Yard	Old Pasture	5	3	7
671	Smiths Piece	Jurriphs	7	3	32
672	Higlays Piece	Wheat	6	3	13
673	Yards End	Wheat	4	3	31
677	Bull Meadow	Clover	8	1	23
682	Clemley Park	Barley	6	0	32
683	Wycherley's Croft	Clover	5	2	22
686	Upper Smiths Piece	Barley	7	1	27
816	Field	Key	2	1	35
817	Near Common Field	Pasture	2	2	15
822	Plantation	Wood	3	0	7
823	Wink Hill Bank	Pasture	2	0	31
868	Dee Bank	Barley	4	0	9
870	Heath Piece	Clover	12	0	30
875	Near Cow Leasow	Old Pasture	9	3	15
876	Far Cow Leasow	Jurriphs	9	1	37
880	Upper White Horse Field	Jurriphs	9	1	4
881	Lower White Horse Field	Clover	8	2	6
883	Long White Horse Field	Wheat	14	2	18
			<u>145</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>6</u>
685	Occupied by John Gray house and garden	wheat potatoes	0	3	35
684	Occupied by William Parbst house and garden		0	2	8
885	Occupied by John Bower house and garden		0	2	12
251	House and Garden at Balderton - Owned by William Henry Bickerton and occupied by John Gray.				

Figure 12: Newton House Farm 1839



Figure 12. Newton House Farm 1965

In 1862 another survey was made. The survey was done for George Owen by Samuel Cartwright. This survey does not cover quite the same land as the 1839 map, in particular it does not cover the Marton area. The boundaries on the other four sections of the 1839 map, the Brandwood area, the Sleaf and Houlston area, the Harmer Hill area, and the Webscott and Hollins area, are very much the same. (see appendix 11). Some of the field boundaries are the same but about half are different and on the whole the hedges or fences are made straighter. The field names are usually the same and differ when the field borders have been changed.

Considerable advances in farming practice were made when swedes and mangold were introduced, and their cultivation mastered. About the middle of the 19th century artificial fertilizers began to play an important part; bone and guano were already popular and super phosphate was beginning to make its mark. During the 'Golden Age' of farming (1850 – 75) Shropshire agriculture must have reached a high standard – the art of mixed husbandry had been thoroughly grasped and was almost universally practiced on the lower land, stock had

been vastly improved, new strains of crops were playing their part, the principles of manuring were being rapidly applied and new methods of drainage were transforming the heavier soils. The fall in corn prices in the 1870s, however, encouraged a tendency to grassland farming. The art of stock management was more advanced than that of grass husbandry and most of the grass established on the lighter soils was of poor quality. Myddle parish must have been some of the better farmed land²⁷ as at the Royal Agricultural Society in 1871 awarded one of its prizes for the best managed arable farm to Balderton Hall farm which was under the successful management of Mr Brewster.

Tithe and its substitute, tithe-rent charge were obviously farmers' liabilities, but in 1891 during the great agricultural depression, the legal liability for the payment had been transferred by statute from the tenant to his landlord. At that time it is probably that some 90% of the agricultural land of the country was farmed on the landlord-and-tenant system, so that farmers as a whole ceased to be concerned with this tax upon the produce of their land. In 1897 there was an altered apportionment made of the tithe rent-charge for the parish of Myddle. This was on the Atcherley Estate at Marton and was an amendment of the rent charges in favour of the Rector. (See appendix 12). The boundaries on this map are somewhat different from those on the tithe map of 1839.

There was some return to arable land occurred during the 1914-18 war. Following the First World War many large agricultural estates came on the market and the tenants to save their homes and their livelihood bought their holdings. Some 40% of the farmers of the country thus became owner-occupiers and they found themselves once again liable for the payment of the tithe-rent charge.

In 1924 the Myddle and Harmer Hill Section (2360 acres) of the Bridgewater Estate was sold to pay the death duties of the late Lord Brownlow. In February of that year, before the sale, the farmers were sent a letter saying that in the event of Lord Brownlow wishing to sell the farm, would they consider buying it. One or two decided to buy the farms.²⁸ The rest of the Myddle and Harmer Hill section of the estate which was not sold privately was put up for auction. There were nearly 130 lots consisting of farms, cottages, odd patches of land, the Quarries and Woodland, in particular Myddle park Wood, which was advertised as having the finest oak in the neighbourhood. (See appendix 13)

In the main the present day farming of Myddle Parish is mixed – oats, barley, wheat, roots, kale etc. Nearly all the farms, if not all, have some milking cows which seems to be one of the main sources of income. There are some sheep but these are in the minority, to be found usually on the larger farms. Some beef cattle are kept. There are still quite large stretches of land, in particular Houlston and Harmer Hill Moss Farm which are very wet and sometimes flooded.

²⁷ Myddle Parish Magazine (Aninton and Norton) 1871 August

²⁸ The original letters in the hands of Mrs H Green, Harmer Hill