



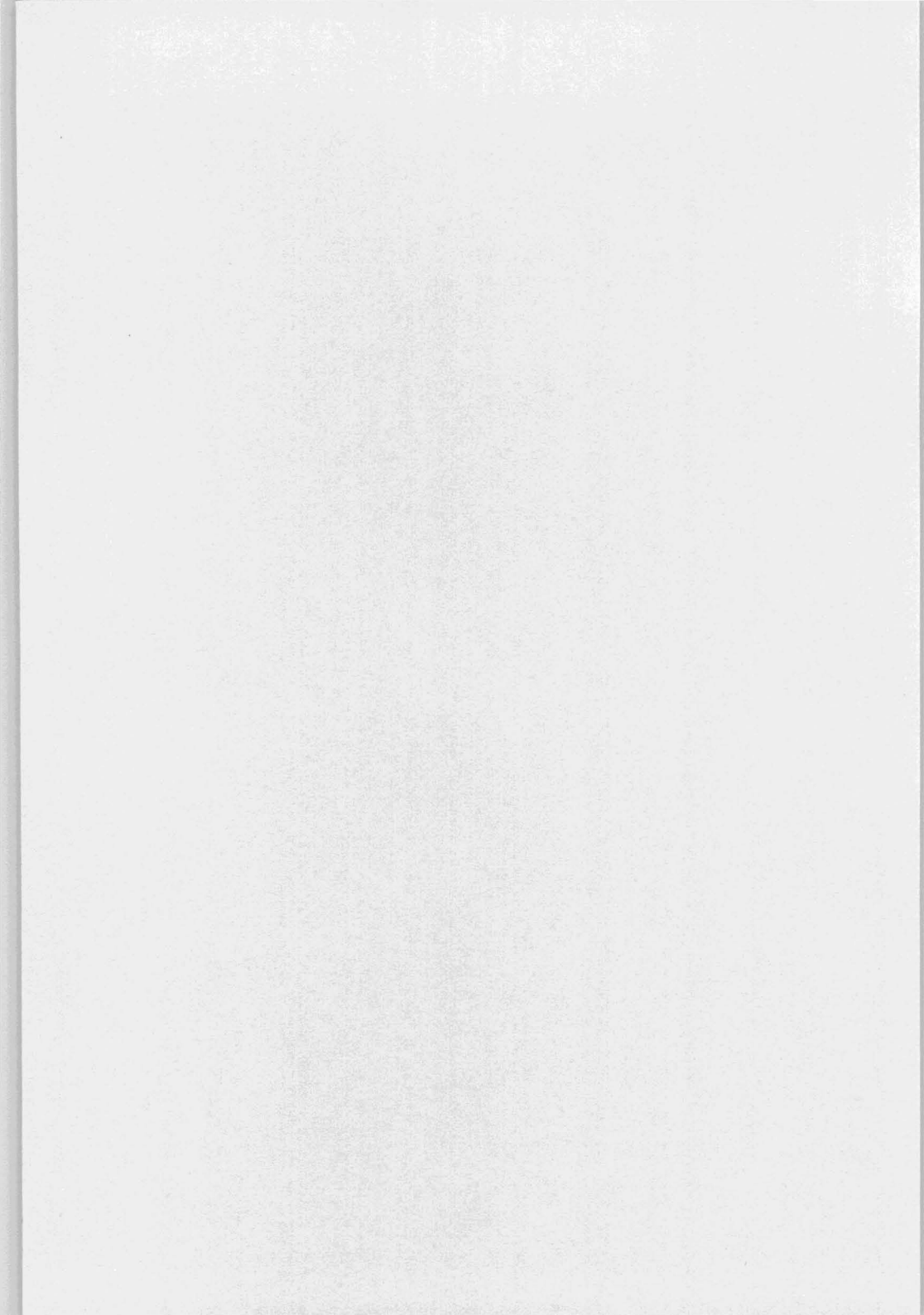
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**ESSEX MEN VINDICATED: OUTPUT, INCOMES
AND INVESTMENT IN AGRICULTURE, 1850-73**

E.H. Hunt and S.J. Pam

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©E.H. Hunt & S.J. Pam
Economic History Department,
London School of Economics.

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E.H. Hunt and S.J. Pam
Department of Economic History
London School of Economics
Houghton Street
London WC2A 2AE
United Kingdom

Phone: +44 (0)71 955 7055

Fax: +44 (0)71 955 7730

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I: INTRODUCTION

Until the 1950s accounts of agriculture in the third quarter of the nineteenth century, in Essex as in England, were reassuringly unequivocal. This was, in Lord Ernle's familiar description, a 'golden age',¹ the triumphal successor to a transitional recovery following the 'blackest day' depression of 1815-37. This halcyon-age of prosperity, 'high farming', enterprise and investment was then swept aside by an avalanche of American grain inaugurating the 'great agricultural depression' of 1874-96.² More recently, of course, each of these certainties has been questioned: did the so-called 'golden age' acquire its lustre when agriculturalists looked back nostalgically from the depths of the succeeding depression? Were not some of the celebrated achievements of 'scientific farming' rather like Concorde, technically splendid but economically suspect? Such questioning has not deprived the period of its historical cohesion. Few doubt that the 'golden age' was a better time for landlords and farmers than preceding or succeeding decades or that incomes and confidence were sufficient to encourage investment and innovation. But the extent and consequences of these and other variables are now debated.

'High-farming' is a case in point. Did this period, as many claim,³ witness exceptional expenditure on farm buildings, drainage, machinery, fertilizer and animal

¹ R.E. Prothero (First Baron Ernle) *English Farming Past and Present* (1912) Sixth edn. (1961). Prothero, in fact, reserved this accolade for the years 1852-63. More commonly, as here, the 'golden age' is considered to coincide with the more general 'mid-Victorian boom'. F.M.L. Thompson's 'golden age' (1853-73), like Prothero's, recognizes low grain prices in the early 1850s.

² Ibid. Chap. XVIII.

³ "Taken as a whole, there was probably much more landlord's capital sunk in farm improvements in the middle years of the nineteenth century than in any comparable period". J.D. Chambers and G.E. Mingay, *The Agricultural Revolution, 1750-1880* (1966), p.163; "Money was poured into land", Prothero, op.cit. p.375.

feed, and which of these investments was most increased? 'High farming' has been variously interpreted as entailing a continued commitment to corn at a time when price signals were urging the opposite, and as having been directed no less towards increasing the livestock element within mixed farming.⁴ Whereas most interpretations assume that the wheat acreage fell significantly,⁵ and E.L. Jones has further claimed that the chief source of prosperity in the 'golden age' was not cereal production but livestock husbandry, others claim that the wheat acreage was constant or increasing.⁶ Whether or not prosperous and enterprising landlords were enlarging their estates is similarly debated. And because some have claimed that structural change in English agriculture was less than the market called-for, or that much of the change that occurred was misdirected,⁷ the landlords' reputation for dynamism and enterprise at this time has also been challenged.

One obvious approach to the investigation of these issues, and to the broad concept of a 'golden age', is through regional analysis. Were the stereotype 'high-farming' estates to be found as readily in Northumberland as in Norfolk? Was 'golden age' Cambridgeshire as prosperous as Cumberland? This article attempts to contribute towards an overall evaluation of English agriculture in the third quarter of the

⁴ F.M.L. Thompson, *English Landed Society in the Nineteenth Century* (1963), pp.254-6; E.L. Jones, *Agriculture and the Industrial Revolution* (Oxford, 1974), Chap.9.

⁵ See, among others, Chambers and Mingay, op. cit. p. 183; S. Fairlie, 'The Corn Laws and British Wheat Production, 1829-76', *Economic History Review*, XXII (1969), pp.101-9, 114-5; L. Drescher, 'The Development of Agricultural Produce in Great Britain and Ireland from the early Nineteenth Century', *Manchester School*, XXIII (1955), pp.155-67.

⁶ Jones, op.cit. Chapt.9. J.C. Morton, *Handbook of Farm Labour* (1868), p.72; M. Olsen and C.C. Harris, 'Free Trade in Corn: A Statistical Study of the Prices and Production of Wheat in Great Britain from 1873 to 1914' *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, LXIII (1959), pp. 149-76.

⁷ Thompson, op.cit. Chap.IX; Chambers and Mingay, op.cit. p.168

nineteenth century by examining the characteristics of farming in Essex, a county where we might expect to find clear evidence of an agrarian 'golden age'. Essex at mid-century contained extensive arable acreage, its farms were larger than the average, and it appeared well-placed to benefit from any stimulus emanating from London and the metropolitan markets.

II: OWNERSHIP, FARM-SIZE AND OUTPUT

In two respects, landownership and farm-size, Essex agriculture witnessed little change of consequence in the third quarter of the century.

Land was bought and sold of course; there was a steady trickle of monied-men from nearby London and some landlords were active in buying-up land adjoining their estates while disposing of more distant farms.⁸ But there was little evidence of large estates either being assembled or dissolved and figures calculated from the tithe files for the early 1840s and those from the 'New Domesday Survey' of 1872-3 show no marked change in patterns of landownership.⁹ Nor was Essex a county dominated by great landowners. In the early 1870s estates of over 3000 acres accounted for some 28 per cent and 41 per cent of farmed land in Essex and in England and Wales respectively.¹⁰

⁸ The exchange of farms by Lord Petre and Arthur Pryor in 1869 to consolidate estate boundaries northwest of Chelmsford is an example of this kind. Essex Record Office (E.R.O.), Petre MSS. Accounts D/DP A365, p.30.

⁹ The number of Essex landowners with over 1000 acres was remarkably stable. P.R.O. I.R. 18 series. About 85 per cent of Essex is covered by the tithe reports; J. Bateman, *The Great Landowners of Great Britain and Ireland* (4th edn. 1883); *Return of the Owners of Land in England and Wales, 1872-3* (PP.1874, LXXII); Thompson, op.cit. pp.122-7.

¹⁰ Tithe Files; Bateman, op.cit; Thompson, op.cit. pp.32,114. Essex was particularly lacking in estates of over 10000 acres and not far from the average in the proportion of land occupied by estates of between 3000 and 10000 acres.

Reliable and comprehensive statistics of farm-size were not collected until 1875¹¹ but it was widely assumed that Essex farms were larger than average and this was certainly so by 1875 when, according to the agricultural returns, the proportion of acreage in holdings in excess of 300 acres was 36 per cent in Essex and 28 per cent in England and Wales.¹² Evidence of changes in farm-size on individual Essex estates is probably a reasonable indicator of trends in the county as a whole before 1875, and on six out of ten estates examined¹³ there was virtually no change in this respect. On the remaining four estates there was a modest increase in average farm-size: Lord Petre's 18,000 acre Thorndon estate, for example, had 49 tenants in 1860 and 47 in 1870.¹⁴ While such estate evidence may not reveal all changes of significance (missing, not least, increased number of smallholdings) it is unlikely to underestimate increases in farm size significantly. Thus at a time when larger farms were regarded as one of the characteristics of 'high farming', change of this kind in Essex was hardly more than perceptible.

What was produced on Essex farms at mid-century and how did output change by the 1870s? Evidence to answer these questions comes mainly from the tithe files (c.1840s), from the 1861 County Rate Returns, from the parish summaries of the official agricultural returns (available from 1866), from estate and farm accounts, and

¹¹ Statistics in the 1851 census are not reliable. In particular, small farms and market gardening are significantly under-enumerated and problems arise concerning the enumeration of multiple holdings.

¹² *Agricultural Returns* (1875) (P.P. 1875, LXXIX, pp.25-7).

¹³ viz: Benyon, Bonnell, the Ecclesiastical Commissioners, Neave, Lord Petre, St. Bartholomew's Hospital, St. John's College, Cambridge, St. Thomas's Hospital, Tower, and Wingfield Baker.

¹⁴ E.R.O. Petre MSS. Tenant Ledgers. D.DP A364-8. Census returns of Essex 'farmers and graziers' (4421 in 1851 and 3925 in 1871) are beset by problems of definition but are broadly compatible with a clear, but modest, long-term increase in farm size.

from R. Barker's 1845 prize essay 'On the Farming of Essex'.¹⁵ Each of the sources has its shortcomings¹⁶ but together they are sufficient to reveal the main features of Essex farming and any significant changes that occurred. The long-standing supposition that arable farming predominated in Essex before 1850 is confirmed and amply illustrated. At mid-century over three-quarters of Essex farmland was arable and in only seven out of almost 300 parishes for which tithe file evidence survives was arable acreage exceeded by pasture.¹⁷ Wheat was the main cash crop, accounting for between 20 and 30 per cent of the arable acreage, about the same as the area under barley and oats combined. No other English county was more dependent upon cereals.¹⁸ A surviving crop book covering several farms, amounting to 3000 acres, on Lord Petre's Thorndon Estate in 1857-9 reproduces the main patterns in Essex agriculture: 78 per cent was arable and almost a third of the arable was wheat.¹⁹ Here, as on most of the county's heavy soils, turnips were of little importance and fallowing was extensive.²⁰

¹⁵ The tithe files and the parish summaries of the agricultural returns are in the Public Record Office (I.R. 18 series; M.A.F. 68 series); the 1861 County Rate Return and Estate and Farm accounts are in the Essex Record Office, Chelmsford (E.R.O., Q/FR 19/1); Barker's prize essay appeared in *Journal of the Royal Agricultural Society of England*, v, (1845).

¹⁶ For more details on the sources see S.J. Pam, 'Essex Agriculture, 1850-1914', forthcoming Ph.D Thesis, University of London, Chapter 3.

¹⁷ The proportion of farmland that was arable is calculated from surviving tithe file evidence and award lists in the E.R.O. that together cover c.87 per cent of acreage and provide cropping details on c.72 per cent of acreage.

¹⁸ R.J.P. Kain. *An Atlas and Index of the Tithe Files of mid-Nineteenth Century England and Wales* (Cambridge, 1986), p.29 and county summaries.

¹⁹ E.R.O. Petre MSS. Crop Book. D/DP E67.

²⁰ Most Essex soils were unsuitable for turnips. Clay soils were liable to 'poach' (become sodden and trampled) in wet weather if sheep were allowed on them or when turnips were lifted. Bare fallowing remained essential to clean and rest the heavier land.

Tithe file evidence suggests that on the eve of the 'golden age' about a quarter of Essex farmland was pasture. Livestock may have been of more consequence than this proportion suggests: Barker, writing in the mid-1840s and anxious to portray Essex agriculture in a favourable light, claimed that cattle were commonly bought in the autumn, yard-fed in winter, folded on fallow land in the summer and fattened for sale the following year.²¹ Some of the 1840s tithe files noted increasing numbers of sheep on the clays. By this time too, the new railways were tapping fresh sources for London's milk beyond the immediate fringes of the metropolis.²² St. Thomas's Hospital, for example, was supplied from a Romford farm by 1846.²³ However, the overwhelming impression remains that on most Essex farms at mid-century livestock husbandry was hardly more than peripheral. The 1840s tithe files mention dairying in only seven parishes, and as late as 1853 only five per cent of London's milk supply came from country districts.²⁴ Caird, concluding his observations on Essex in 1851-2 and urging more attention to livestock, particularly to milk production, wrote "hitherto the chief dependence of the farmer has been on his corn crops, cattle being kept for manure, but not generally as a source of profit".²⁵

²¹ Barker, loc.cit. p.15.

²² Before 1830 dairying was common only within an eight-mile radius of the City. Mr. Main (*sic*), 'Some Account of the Mode of Fattening Calves in the Neighbourhood of London' *Quarterly Journal of Agriculture*, v (1835), p.608.

²³ G. Dodd, *The Food of London* (1856), p.122.

²⁴ South Essex provided most of the rail-carried milk. P.J. Atkins, 'The Growth of London's Railway Milk Trade, c. 1845-1914', *Journal of Transport History* IV (1978), p.209. St. Bartholomew's Hospital was still supplied with milk from nearby Islington until 1860. St. Bartholomew's Hospital MSS. Governors' Minutes. Ha/1/21-23.

²⁵ James Caird, *English Agriculture in 1850-1* (2nd. edn. New York, 1967), p.142.

How much had Caird's advice been heeded twenty years later? Essex in 1870 displayed very few signs of that extensive conversion to pasture said to have been in progress by the 1860s:²⁶ the balance between arable and pasture appears to have altered remarkably little. A minority of Essex farmers, perhaps heedful of favourable trends in livestock prices, had converted to pasture. John Youngerson, for example, near Chelmsford, converted 155 acres in the mid-1860s "on account of the high price of stock and the cost of labour".²⁷ But such cases must have been exceptional because the proportion of Essex farmland that was pasture appears to have *fallen* from c.27 per cent in 1840 to c.20 per cent in 1870.²⁸ These figures, admittedly, are based on incomplete tithe evidence (covering about 87 per cent of the county) and the acreage under grain in 1870 may have been influenced by high grain prices in 1867 and 1868. But the evidence is sufficiently robust to preclude the possibility that pasture increased by much. Moreover, farm accounts of conversion to pasture are more than matched by similar accounts of ploughing-up, including for example that at Althorne Hall on the Dengie peninsula (25 acres of arable in 1858, 117 acres by 1869) and the conversion of marsh pasture at Chadwell in 1852.²⁹ A later commentator (T.S. Dymond, 1901) described "most of the good old grassland on the heavy clay soil of south east Essex" being "broken-up" in the 1850s.³⁰

²⁶ Jones, *Agriculture and the Industrial Revolution*, pp. 200, 202.

²⁷ M. Evans and T. Bowstead, 'Report on Laying Down Land to Permanent Pasture', *Journal of the Royal Agricultural Society of England*, 2nd.ser. XI (1875), p.489.

²⁸ Tithe files; *Agricultural Returns (GB) 1870* (P.P. 1870, LXVIII), pp.28-9, 363 ff.

²⁹ St. Bartholomew's Hospital MSS., Almoner's Reports, 1858-69, E08/6; Church Commission, Ecclesiastical Commissioners MSS., London Cathedral Surveys S1, Biggins Manor Estate Report, pp.294-315.

³⁰ T.S. Dymond, 'Agricultural and Miscellaneous Notes: The Manuring of Essex Pastures', *Journal of the Board of Agriculture*, VIII, No. 1, (June, 1901), p347.

Of course, reduced grass acreage does not necessarily indicate increased cereal production nor fewer livestock. Some arable land, probably an increasing proportion, was devoted to fodder, and market gardening almost certainly was expanding in the 1850s and 1860s. Evidence on the livestock population, in fact, does suggest increasing numbers although by no means on the scale that Caird would have advised. Comparison of the somewhat meagre tithe file evidence on stock-keeping in the 1840s and the parish agricultural returns of 1870 gives the impression of a small overall increase in stocking with considerable variety between locations.³¹ Individual farm accounts and estate records likewise show only modest increases in stock-keeping: on farms at Audley End (near Saffron Walden) and Great Henny (close to the Suffolk border), for example, and there was no increase at all on the Tabor farms in north-central Essex.³² And while dairying had expanded it was still far too restricted to have much impact on the general character of Essex farming except along the London-Chelmsford railway and in a few other localities: in 1870-2 dairying accounted for less than 5 per cent of Essex farm output.³³ Low levels of investment in farm-buildings (below, p.18) is likewise consistent with no more than very limited increases in livestock keeping during the 'golden age'.

In most parts of Essex, therefore, arable farming lost little of its importance despite a tentatively increased emphasis on meat and dairy output. And the importance of wheat, the main cash crop, appears to have been more than maintained: wheat accounted for an estimated 20 per cent of Essex farmland in 1840 and about 24

³¹ For comment on the accuracy of the agricultural returns with regard to livestock numbers see Pam, *loc.cit.* Chap.3.

³² E.R.O. Braybrooke MSS., Audley End Home Farm Accounts, D/DBy A 267-70; Miscellaneous Farm Accounts, Great Henny, D/DU 441/54-68; Tabor MSS., D/DTa A77.

³³ This is an estimate. Essex farm output in 1870-2 is calculated in Pam, *loc.cit.* Chap.5, using the methods E.M. Ojala followed to calculate national agricultural output.

percent in 1870-2 by which time it occupied only around 14 per cent of the total English acreage.³⁴ A surviving crop book for Great Henny farm (321 acres) gives a similar impression: there wheat acreage was 65 in 1847-8, 81 in 1861-2, and 88 in 1871-2.³⁵ The contribution of Essex evidence to debate on whether or not wheat acreage declined significantly in the 'golden age', and whether livestock expanded at the expense of cereals, is therefore unequivocal. Essex wheat and cereal output, like Essex landownership and farm-size, was characterized by continuity. As late as 1867 one of the allegedly more enlightened Essex farmers, J.J. Mechi, described livestock farming in terms that echoed Caird's mid-century comment (above, p.6) on its traditionally peripheral role in corn country: animals, wrote Mechi, failed to "pay market price for their food" but were necessary as "providers of the best and cheapest manure".³⁶ Despite price trends in favour of livestock and much publicity for 'high farming', the primacy of corn was not yet seriously challenged.

III: INCOMES

Was continuity in landownership and the composition of farm output accompanied by sufficient improvement in Essex agrarian fortunes to justify the 'golden' epithet conventionally attached to these years? It is, of course, the incomes of landlords and farmers that have been so fulsomely described. Labourers' real incomes rose in the 'golden age', but they rose more rapidly in the succeeding 'agricultural depression' and even then were hardly 'golden'. Discussion here, therefore, is concerned with the fortunes of landlords and farmers. While a minority of Essex landlords enjoyed

³⁴ Tithe files; *Agricultural Returns* (1870-2), (P.P. 1870, LXVIII, LXXVIII; 1871, LXIX; 1872 LXIII).

³⁵ E.R.O. Misc. Farm Accounts: Great Henny D/DU 441/54, 55, 59, 64, 66.

³⁶ *Chester Courant*, 16th Oct. 1867.

considerable non-agricultural incomes,³⁷ the great majority derived most of their income from farm rents. Thus their fortunes were closely related to those of local farming. Evidence on Essex rents comes from two main sources: the Income Tax Schedule A (Lands Only) Assessments³⁸ and from surviving rent-rolls for individual farms on thirteen Essex estates.³⁹ The taxation records are comprehensive and represent a useful, if only approximate,⁴⁰ guide to long-term changes in landlords' rental income. Estate rent-rolls provide complementary evidence of rent movements on specific Essex farms. Unfortunately, rent-roll evidence from the very beginning of the period (1850-1) is available for only three estates, although other estates have continuous records from the time when rents began to rise in the mid-1850s.

In Essex, as elsewhere in England, rents fell in the first four years of the 'golden age' and continued to rise for four or five years after the onset of depression in 1873. Between 1850-2 and 1870-2 Essex rents, according to the income tax assessments, rose by about a quarter. Estate rent evidence is broadly compatible with that taken

³⁷ Sir Thomas Maryon Wilson, for example, with City interests and land in Hampstead and Blackheath. Maryon Wilson MSS. E.R.O., Greater London Record Office (G.L.R.O.).

³⁸ P.R.O. I.R. 16 series

³⁹ Estates and period of surviving rents evidence: Belhus, Aveley, from 1857 (Sir T.B. Lennard); Good Easter and Dengie, from 1853 (Bonnell); Thorndon, from 1859 (Lord Petre); Guy's Hospital, from 1855; St. Bartholomew's Hospital, from 1850; Dagness, Romford, from 1855 (Sir T. Neave); South Weald, Brentwood, from 1866 (C.J. Tower); St. John's College, Cambridge, from 1851; North Ockendon, from 1858 (R. Benyon); St. Thomas's Hospital, from 1855; North Benfleet, from 1863 (Ecclesiastical commissioners); Bower Hall Estate, from 1850; Orsett, from 1854 (Wingfield-Baker).

⁴⁰ They refer to parks and gardens as well as agricultural land, take no account of temporary rent remissions or abatements, and were slow to incorporate changes in rents. Moreover, improved administration in the mid-1860s increased the amount of tax collected by more than rentals were increased. J.C. Stamp, *British Incomes and Property* (1916) discusses taxation assessment.

from the taxation returns,⁴¹ but the estate records also illustrate great variety in rent, and in rent increases, within the county: rents of land suitable for livestock or market-gardening and well-placed to take advantage of growing markets or transport improvement were above average in 1850 and at an increasing premium throughout the 'golden age'. On Lord Petre's Thorndon Estate, for example, rent on Bacons and Dagness farms, on good mixed soils in the Mountnessing district close to the Chelmsford to London railway, rose by 24 per cent between 1859 and 1874. At the latter date rent per acre on these farms was over 70 per cent higher than that on the London-clay Tillingham Hall farm (near East Horndon and some distance from a railway) where rent had increased only 9 per cent since 1859.⁴² On the south-Essex Belhus Estate, of mainly fertile, well-drained, soils suitable for market gardening, rents increased by more than three-quarters between 1857 and 1874.⁴³ Given relative price movements before and during the 'golden age', higher and more rapidly rising rents on land suitable for livestock or market gardening is hardly surprising, but the tardiness of structural change in Essex farming noted above appears the more remarkable. Farmers perhaps were encouraged to maintain grain output because adverse price movements were partially compensated by lower rents. Landlords

⁴¹ For twenty farms scattered across the 18,000 acre Thorndon Estate (central and southern Essex) between 1859 and 1874 rents increased by 16 per cent, a little less than the county increase suggested by the taxation assessment over the same period (20 per cent). E.R.O. Petre MSS. Thorndon Estate. Annual Accounts D/DP. A326-60. On the smaller Bower Hall and St. Bartholomew's Hospital estates, average rent per acre between 1850 and 1874 increased by the same proportion as the county increase indicated by taxation evidence. E.R.O. Bower Hall MSS. D/DHf; St. Bartholomew's Hospital Archives; MSS, General A/C 1850-74, F.D.1.

⁴² E.R.O. Petre MSS. Thorndon Account Ledger. D/DP A359 and Tenants' Ledgers. D/DP A366. Caird, of course, had noted such differences in 1850 when he compared average rentals of 20s to 30s per acre in fertile north-east Essex with rents as low as 10s to 15s on the stiff clays. Caird *op.cit.*, p.136.

⁴³ E.R.O., Barrett-Lennard MSS. Correspondence. DDL C67,68.

appear to have had more reason to reduce dependence on cereals, although whether the incentive was sufficient to repay investment in conversion is another question.

How average rent increases translated into changes in landlords' real income varied at different times. In the first half of the 1850s, when rents fell, landlords could hardly have been aware that a 'golden age' had begun. The 1860s, when rents generally pushed ahead of prices, were more conducive to landlords' well-being, but over the whole of the 'golden age' era (1850-2 to 1870-2) prices (according to Rousseaux's figures) increased by 26 per cent, about as much as the increase of Essex rents.⁴⁴ The comparison is approximate of course: comparing different years and clusters of years produces different answers and doubtless the average Essex landlord disposed of his income in ways not faithfully reflected in Rousseaux's index. But the most optimistic generalization about Essex landlords' rental incomes in the 'golden age' is that, in real terms, they increased, but only modestly. Naturally in some places, like the Belhus estate or Bacons Farm and Dagness Farm (above), rent increases were more compatible with the description 'golden age'. But there were also, of course, examples like Tillingham Hall Farm on the Thorndon estate (above), or the Essex lands of the St Thomas's Hospital estates where real rent/acre appears to have fallen.⁴⁵

There is scant evidence of outstandingly prosperity for Essex farmers either, although they seem to have fared rather better than landlords. Their fortunes seem likely to have depended considerably on what they produced. All farm prices fluctuated from year to year but there is no doubt that over the period wheat prices rose less than livestock prices and less than non-farm prices. Comparing five year averages at the

⁴⁴ B.R. Mitchell and P. Deane, *Abstract of British Historical Statistics* (Cambridge, 1962), p 472. The Sauerbeck-Statist index (*ibid.* p.474) shows a somewhat greater price rise over this period (32 per cent).

⁴⁵ The St. Thomas's estate archives (G.L.R.O.) indicate rent increase per acre of only 14 per cent between 1850 and 1874.

beginning and end of the period (1846-50 and 1869-73) wheat prices rose by 11 per cent: there were five years in the 1850s, and five in the 1860s, when the price of wheat was below the average for 1846-50.⁴⁶ Barley prices rose by rather more, by 18 per cent or by about as much as the overall change in prices,⁴⁷ and meat prices, according to reports in the *Essex County Standard*, rose by comfortably more than the rate of inflation: mutton by 35 per cent, prime beef by 55 per cent.⁴⁸

Over a period when average rents increased by 20 per cent or more and when labourers' real wages and the cost of labour per acre were rising,⁴⁹ corn farmers would have needed to increase productivity substantially to secure more than modest prosperity. Productivity was rising and returns on tenants' capital investments were

⁴⁶ Mitchell and Deane, op.cit. pp. 488-9. Returns from the Romford, Colchester, Chelmsford, Braintree and Saffron Walden markets show that Essex grain prices followed the national pattern.

⁴⁷ Ibid. pp. 488-9 Between the same five-year periods the Sauerbeck-Statist and Rousseaux indices show, respectively, general price rises of 24 and 14 per cent. Ibid. pp. 472-4.

⁴⁸ The newspaper figures compare 1846-50 with 1870-73. Whetham's figures show less divergence between changes in mutton and beef prices but increases of broadly the same order as those suggested by the *Essex County Standard*. Her figures also suggest that movements in the prices of 'middling beef' and 'prime beef' were near identical. E.H. Whetham, 'Livestock Prices in Britain, 1851-93', *Agricultural History Review*, XI (1963), p.203.

⁴⁹ Rising labour costs are evident in three surviving accounts of farms in different parts of Essex and in the accounts of another Essex farm analysed by F.C. Danvers in 1897. At Great Henny Farm, for example, the total labour bill rose by 38 per cent between 1850 and the mid-1870s and wages increased in importance relative to other farm inputs. On the farm investigated by Danvers labour costs increased by c.60 per cent. E.R.O. Miscellaneous Farm Accounts, Great Henny Farm D/DU 441. 53-78; E.R.O. Braybrooke MSS. Home Farm Accounts D/DBY A267-70; Reading University Library, Doggotts Hall Farm Accounts, ESS 18/2/1/-46; F.C. Danvers, 'Agriculture in Essex during the past Fifty Years as exemplified by the Records of one Farm.' *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society* lx (1897) p.263.

satisfactory.⁵⁰ Differentiated rent increases helped also, in effect transferring part of the consequences of low grain prices to landlords. Thus there were few signs of farmers in distress. Some tenants quit as a consequence of financial difficulties and some became bankrupt but far fewer than those affected after 1872 when signs of hardship multiplied. On five Essex estates where this change can be measured the percentage of quittings ascribed to serious financial losses or bankruptcy was 16 per cent between 1850 and 1873 and 36 per cent between 1873 and 1900.⁵¹ The *Essex County Standard* recorded just seven farmer-bankrupts in 1870-2 but 53 in 1880-2. There is Essex evidence also that lends at least some credence to the *Punch* stereotype 'golden-age' farmer who spent extravagantly on home, family and entertainment.⁵² Without doubt then there was reason why farmers should later look back fondly upon the 1850s and 1860s. But the final impression is of modest comfort rather than of unprecedented prosperity. This must have been especially the case for the majority of Essex farmers whose livelihoods depended much upon sales of grain.

IV: 'HIGH FARMING' AND INVESTMENT

Absence of anything beyond modest prosperity for many Essex farmers and most Essex landlords, and the prominence of those least dependent upon grain among the more prosperous, focuses attention again on the remarkably slow pace of structural change in Essex farming at a time when landlords are said to have been eager to invest and innovate. How important was 'high farming' in Essex and what changes did it

⁵⁰ Surviving farm accounts suggest that Essex tenants could expect average returns of 10 per cent or more on working capital invested in the 'golden age'. E.R.O. Braybrooke MSS. Home Farm Accounts D/DBY, A267-9; E.R.O. Misc.Farm Accounts, Great Henny Farm D/DU 441/55-75.

⁵¹ Estate archives for St. Bartholomew's Hospital, Benyon, Ecclesiastical Commissioners, St. John's College, Cambridge and St. Thomas's Hospital.

⁵² Farmers' expenditure and social lives are mentioned below, p.p. 25-6.

introduce? What evidence can Essex offer to debate on the existence (or absence) of a golden-age "agricultural revolution on the English clays".⁵³

As indicated earlier, 'high farming' is somewhat of a portmanteau description: most commonly it describes systems of mixed farming in which greater output was achieved by increased investment, especially upon draining. Typically, increased grain production is understood to have occurred alongside reduced fallowing and an expanded output of turnips and other fodder crops that provided 'high feeding' for sheep and cattle. 'High farming', associated also with large farms and large estates, usually entailed additional buildings, especially to house cattle; farm-grown fodder might be supplemented by increased purchases of enriched animal food; and arable productivity was stimulated by greater use of fertilizers and machinery, including the much-publicised steam-ploughing. As a system it was both capital-intensive and labour-intensive and, while dairying and pasture were not precluded, the emphasis in livestock husbandry was high-feeding to maximize production of meat and manure from folded or stall-fed animals. Many accounts, like those of F.M.L. Thompson and R.W. Sturgess, regard 'high-farming' after 1850 as, in essence, the application to newly-drained heavy soils of techniques already successfully employed on the lighter soils.⁵⁴ Others, however, have questioned both claims of massive investment at this time and the applicability of 'high-farming' techniques to the more-recalcitrant clays.⁵⁵ The London clays that comprised perhaps a third of Essex farmland were

⁵³ R.W. Sturgess. 'The Agricultural Revolution on the English Clays', *Agricultural History Review*, XIV (1966) Part II; Responding to Sturgess, E.J.T. Collins and E.L. Jones, in 'Sectoral Advance in English Agriculture, 1850-80,' *Ag. Hist. Rev.* XV (1967), Pt II, suggested that on much English clayland investment was neither extensive nor noticeably successful. Replying, Sturgess argued that with regard to south-eastern claylands his views and those of Collins and Jones were not far apart. (*Ag. Hist. Rev.* XV (1967), Pt II).

⁵⁴ Sturgess (1966) loc cit.; Thompson op.cit. p.246.

⁵⁵ Contrast the views of, for example, F.M.L. Thompson ("great schemes of agricultural investment... great landowners pouring money into their estates")

particularly unrewarding. Essex boulder clays, which covered another quarter of the county, also required careful management, especially in wet weather.⁵⁶

The earlier evidence on the unchanging balance between arable and pasture is not necessarily incompatible with widespread high-farming in Essex because reduced fallowing, and greater numbers of folded and stall-fed animals, together with more manuring, could result in increased output of both livestock and grain with pasture acreage unchanged. However, the tithe files, the later parish agricultural returns, and estate records also indicate that except on the fringes of London, along the railways, and on less-heavy soils in a few other places, livestock numbers increased very little (above, p.8). If 'high farming' made much impression across Essex as a whole, therefore, it must have been 'high farming' of the kind subsequently criticized for giving first priority to maximising corn output when market indicators signalled greater concentration upon livestock.⁵⁷ Disparaging comment on the place of livestock in mixed farming by the best-known Essex advocate of 'high farming', J.J. Mechi (above p.9), is certainly consistent with such an interpretation.

Mechi was a businessman-turned-farmer and owner-occupier of Tiptree Hall, a 170 acre heavy-soil farm in east-central Essex. He invested lavishly and, according to

op.cit. 246-7,253 or that of Chambers and Mingay cited above (n.3) with those of E.J.T. Collins and E.L. Jones (loc.cit) pp.68-9). The suitability of 'high farming' techniques on the clays is discussed below.

⁵⁶ There was, of course, a variety of soils in Essex, as elsewhere, but the county's distinguishing pedological feature was the preponderance (in excess of 60 per cent) of heavy soils. One Dengie farmer described his sub-soil as "stiff, tough, numb, dumb and impervious". *R.C. on Agricultural Depression: Report of R.H. Pringle*, P.P. 1894, XVI, Pt.I), p.37. Caird's summary of Essex farming (op.cit. p.133) included the note: "variety of soils - chiefly clay". For details of Essex soil-types see Pam, *loc.cit.*, Chap 1.

⁵⁷ Thompson (op.cit. pp. 253, 255) refers to landlords "held in thrall by corn" and "improvements all too often directed towards encouraging good corn farming when the trend of the times favoured animal husbandry".

Caird, kept the whole farm "in constant tillage".⁵⁸ But how representative was he of Essex agriculturalists? The key issue in answering this question must be landlord expenditure. What evidence is there of Essex landowners taking part in a great mid-century investment extravaganza? There is some evidence of this kind: Richard Benyon (1565 acres, Ockendon), for example, was a textbook improving landlord. He invested heavily in the 1840s, spent a further £8000 on drainage in the 1850s and 1860s, and never hesitated to erect new farm buildings or cottages as the need arose.⁵⁹ Lord Petre re-invested 15 per cent of the Thorndon estate (18000 acres) rents; the governors of St Bartholomew's re-invested a similar proportion of their Essex rents in the 1860s; St Thomas's lands in Essex were considerably improved also; and C.J. Tower (2481 acres, South Weald), W. Bower-Smyth (2819 acres, Theydon), and the Earl of Essex (3090 acres, Rayne) were other Essex landlords dedicated to improvement via substantial investment.⁶⁰

But these examples are not representative of landlord activity in Essex as a whole. Other estate evidence and material from surviving land company ledgers suggests strongly that capital investment in 'golden age' Essex was far less than most general accounts imply. Few Essex landowners (and few Essex tenants) are listed as borrowers in the surviving Land Company ledgers, or in the records of loans made under the Public Drainage and Improvement of Land Acts, and the amounts they

⁵⁸ Caird, *op.cit.* p.141. Farmer Prout, who used super-phosphate and nitrate of soda to grow continuous crops of wheat and barley on his stockless 450 acre clay farm on the Essex-Herts border, provides a similar example. R. Brigden, *Victorian Farms* (Ramsbury, 1986) pp. 231-3.

⁵⁹ E.R.O. Benyon MSS. D/DBe. E42, 46, 15, 44, 55, 57, 66.

⁶⁰ E.R.O. Petre MSS. Thorndon Estate Accounts, D/DP. A309-326, 341-50; St. Bartholomew's Hospital, MSS. Almoner's Reports, 1869-87, ED 8/6, Minutes of the Board of Governors Ha/1/20-3, Rentals ED 16, General Account 1850-70, FDI; G.L.R.O., St. Thomas's Hospital, MSS. County Estates Log Book, H1/ST/E18. Clerk's Rental H1/ST/E30/7-20, 27; 'Notes on Estate Improvement, 1800-40', H1/ST/E60/17. E.R.O. Tower, MSS; Letter. D/D Tw A6; P.R.O. Drainage Loan Ledgers. M.A.F. 66/1, 2,3,11. IR 3/3.

borrowed were small: the largest of the land companies, the General Land Drainage Company, lent only £23,922 to Essex owners between 1851 and 1870.⁶¹ From these sources it appears that the total borrowed for drainage alone between 1847 and 1874 was unlikely to have much exceeded £30,000.⁶² If we accept A.D.M. Phillips' recent estimate that loan-capital commonly constituted about one-fifth of total drainage outlay,⁶³ then investment under this heading in Essex during the 'golden age' was sufficient to drain only some 25,000 acres, or not much over three per cent of Essex farmland.⁶⁴ Loans for new farm buildings and cottages amounted to about £28,250 over the same period, and if we again assume that four-fifths of investment was (like drainage) privately financed, investment under this heading was only about £17 per 100 acres over 27 years.⁶⁵ These, of course, are rough estimates but their implication is confirmed in the accounts of several Essex estates: on the Belhus estate (3700 acres) a mere 3 per cent of rents were reinvested between 1867 and 1876; the proportion reinvested was even lower on the Bonnell estate (1945 acres), and at Bower

⁶¹ Two other companies lent £15,547 in the 1860s. P.R.O. Drainage Loan Ledgers M.A.F. 66 series. P.R.O. General Land Drainage Company, Ledger 1, 1851-1868, Ledger 2, 1868-96, M.A.F. 66/1-2; Land Improvement Company, Ledger 1861-69, M.A.F. 66/3; Land Loan and Enfranchisement Company, Ledger 1, 1861-78, M.A.F. 66/4.

⁶² Calculated from evidence in A.D.M. Phillips, *The Underdraining of Farmland in England in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1989).

⁶³ *Ibid.* p.117.

⁶⁴ Contemporary estimates put the cost of drainage at around £6 per acre. See, for example, Caird in *S.C. on Improvement of Land* (PP.1873, xvi), QQ 4127-8; Phillips *op.cit.* p.86; Chambers and Mingay, *op.cit.* p.176; Thompson, *op.cit.* p.248.

⁶⁵ A new cattle shed at this time cost, typically, around £150: see, for examples, St. John's College, Cambridge, MSS. Accounts. SB4, Rentals (new cattle sheds, Rawreth 1862,1863); St. Thomas's Hospital MSS. Accounts HI/ST/A6113 (new cowshed, Aveley 1856); Bonnell MSS. (E.R.O.) D/DHn E4, 'Particulars of Old Leases and Present Leases and Money Spent on Repairs on Essex Farms' (Skinnerswick, 1869). Other references indicate that sheds of different sizes might cost as little as £50 and as much as £245.

Hall (1158 acres) was barely one per cent between 1850 and 1862.⁶⁶ Very little improvement, other than necessary repairs, appears to have been carried out on Guy's Hospital land in the 1850s and only 2 per cent of rent went on improvement in the following decade.⁶⁷ The fellows of St. John's College, Cambridge, were similarly parsimonious with less than 2 per cent ploughed back on improvements in the 1850s and not much more (3.25 per cent) in the 1860s.⁶⁸ There is also a great deal of piecemeal evidence that reinforces these accounts of sparse investment: surveys undertaken by the Ecclesiastical Commissioners (1852-73), for example, refer repeatedly to inadequate and poorly maintained farm buildings on properties held by beneficial lease holders, and much the same was said of the Essex farms bought by St. Bartholomew's Hospital.⁶⁹ Likewise, a report of 1869 on the Earl of Verulam's Messing Estate (1120 acres) noted a "considerable acreage requires drainage" and complained of farm buildings "old and considerably out of repair".⁷⁰ A later (1886) account of the Orsett Estate includes a plea that new buildings and drainage "should

⁶⁶ E.R.O. Barrett-Lennard MSS. Correspondence D/DL; E.R.O. Bonnell MSS. 'Particulars of Old Leases etc...' D/DHn. E4.

⁶⁷ *Royal Commission on Agriculture* (PP. 1894, xvi, pt.1 Appendix A - ix - 2), p. 425.

⁶⁸ St. John's College, Cambridge, MSS. Rentals 1850-70. S.B. 4; Senior Bursar's Statement on the Audit, 1893. D100.70. Other, similar, evidence includes that from St. Osyth estate where expenditure on repairs and improvement combined amounted to 4 per cent of rents in the early and mid-1850s, and from Tyrell's Boreham estate (1854-6) and the Rev. A.W. Buller's Rettendon farms (1850s) where this expenditure was between 2 and 3 per cent of rents. Tyrell Estate A/C E.R.O. D/Dke A9; cashbook of Rettendon Properties E.R.O. D/DSw A1.

⁶⁹ Church Commissioners, Ecclesiastical Commissioners MSS., London Cathedral, London Bishopric and London Chapter surveys. S1 pp. 294-315; S3, pp. 357-415; S4, pp. 231-75; St. Bartholomew's Hospital MSS. Surveyors' Reports E08/1. General Account 1850-70. FDI.

⁷⁰ Hertfordshire C.R.O. Earl of Verulam MSS, Messing Estate Valuation (1869), xi. 122, Box 64.

not be neglected any longer" and Pringle later emphasized lack of investment in Essex during the 'golden age' among the causes of the succeeding depression.⁷¹

This evidence of decidedly modest investment on most Essex farms is obviously compatible with what was said earlier on the absence of significant changes in farm size, estate size, and livestock holdings. Other evidence on high-farming is more fragmentary but none was found that significantly modifies the emerging impression that Essex took little part in mid-century agrarian innovation. Farm sale catalogues indicate increased use of farm machinery, including iron ploughs, oilcake breakers, mangold pulpers, horse hoes, scarifiers, mowers and rollers. But the change was no more than incremental: one report noted barley still being hand-thrashed in the 1870s and despite considerable local advertising Essex boasted only two operational sets of steam ploughing tackle in 1866.⁷² In 1870 turnips and swedes still occupied a mere 2 per cent of clayland parishes, significantly less than the acreage under fallow.⁷³ Similarly with intensive manuring and fertilizing: most surviving farm accounts and railway company carriage records testify to some increased use of purchased fertilizer, such practices were commonplace in a few parishes and evident also on the farms of enlightened or eccentric individuals throughout the county.⁷⁴ But here also the extent

⁷¹ E.R.O. Whitmore MSS. Drivers Report p.4. See also the 1879 survey of the Eastern Lodge estate (c.8600 acres) with details of buildings in need of urgent repair. E.R.O. Eastern Lodge Estate MSS. Surveys and suggestions on repairs (1879), DIDMg, E27-36; *R.C. on Agricultural Depression* (P.P. 1894, XVI, Pt I, pp.39,58-9 and oral evidence QQ. 8765-6).

⁷² I. Mead, *The Story of an Essex Lad Written by Himself* (Chelmsford, 1923) p.32; G.E. Fussell, 'Essex Farming, 1840-80', *Essex Farmers' Journal* (1947), p.324.

⁷³ About 12 per cent of boulder clayland, and 7 per cent of London clayland was under fallow. P.R.O. Parish Summary of the Agricultural Returns for 1870: Essex, M.A.F. 68/240.

⁷⁴ Farmer Prout's use of chemicals in preference to rotation and dung was mentioned above (n.58); Farmer Hutley treated his Witham fields with starfish as well as guano, chalk and artificials. *Select Committee on Agricultural*

of change was too modest to substantiate claims that 'high farming' had become widespread.

It is clear that while a minority of Essex landlords invested with textbook open-handedness, the majority were less extravagant and some were parsimonious. The tithe files suggest that at the beginning of the 'golden age' high farming was extensively practised in fewer than a tenth of the county's parishes, most of them near to London: 'high farming' at that time was "the exception rather than the rule".⁷⁵ All the subsequent evidence indicates no more than a gradual and limited expansion of such practices in the following twenty-five years and very little that substantiates the textbook accounts of massive investment, new crops, new machinery and methods. Essex was a corn county in 1850 and hardly less so in 1873. And, by and large, corn was still produced by methods not radically different from those Caird witnessed in his mid-century tour: without much more reliance on complementary stock and fodder, and without greatly increased use of fertilizer and machinery. Farming in Essex thus appears not entirely compatible with either of the interpretations of third-quarter agricultural trends offered by E.L. Jones and F.M.L. Thompson. Jones' suggestion (above, p.2) that the main source of farm prosperity in the 'golden age' was not cereals but livestock hardly applies to Essex because dependence on livestock there was so slight.⁷⁶ And whatever their importance elsewhere, F.M.L. Thompson's "great schemes of agricultural investment to render the clay farms as like the turnip farms as possible", were not much evident in Essex.⁷⁷

Customs (P.P. 1866, VI), QQ, 2126-7, 2140.

⁷⁵ E.A. Cox. 'An Agricultural Geography of Essex c.1840' (unpublished M.A. thesis, University of London, 1963), p.155.

⁷⁶ Jones might retort that Essex prosperity was slight also. He could add that what has been said of Essex farming here is entirely compatible with the arguments he and E.J.T. Collins advanced in their 'Sectoral Advances in English Agriculture, 1850-80', *Ag.H.R.* XV(1967).

⁷⁷ Thompson, *op.cit.* p.246.

V: Complacency and Continuity?

If the Essex experience offers little support for the once conventional view of agriculture having prospered in the third quarter of the century, with prosperity then spurring effort and expenditure towards maximising output, does it perhaps lend greater support to quite different, and more recently fashionable, interpretations that emphasize how little was changed in English agriculture at this time?⁷⁸ And this despite prevailing price signals and the forthright advocacy of those, like James Caird, who urged adaptation to a world of freer trade and falling freight rates? From this latter perspective landlords and farmers, complacent and apathetic, are accused of dissipating the long breathing-space between corn-law repeal and the main onslaught of new-world cereals in the 1870s. Caird himself, on the eve of the 'golden age', accused Essex landlords of "complete indifference to agricultural enterprise" and urged the county's clayland farmers to respond to the almost boundless metropolitan demand for milk.⁷⁹

What has been said of modest investment and dilatory change in Essex farming practices is obviously broadly consistent with this more critical appraisal. And there is further evidence of similar implication, especially with regard to the landlords' performance. One aspect of the general disinclination of many landlords to invest in the 'golden age' appears to have been that investment initiatives now came more often from their tenants who drew attention to neglected opportunities or even raised loans to undertake investment themselves. None of this was new: tenants traditionally provided working-capital, undertook considerable maintenance and running repairs, and had sometimes borrowed to finance improvements. But there now occurred a subtle shifting of the boundary between landlords' and farmers' responsibilities, partly

⁷⁸ See, for example, Chap.2 in G.E. Mingay (ed.) *Agrarian History of England and Wales VI, 1750-1850* (Cambridge, 1989), pp.126-7.

⁷⁹ Caird, *op.cit.* pp. 134. 142.

in response to easier market conditions that increased the attractiveness of tenancies, eased landlord fears of farmers quitting, and discouraged insistence that landlords fulfil their share of repairs.⁸⁰ Essex estate accounts for this period list many grants of tiles to tenants, indicating that landlords preferred to drain individual fields or farms on a 'materials only' basis rather than finance a major drainage programme.⁸¹ On the Guy's Hospital estates between 1853 and the 1870s most heavy-soil drainage was financed by tenants who also paid for improvement such as altering hedges, straightening fences, enclosing waste and making repairs of a kind once undertaken by landlords.⁸²

A minority of Essex landlords engaged in day-to-day estate management⁸³ and some provided more dynamic leadership, pioneering new methods and urging improvements upon their tenants.⁸⁴ But the majority appear to have been content to delegate extensively to agents of varying competence. Certainly there is a contrast between their indifferent leadership and the robust entrepreneurship of eighteenth-century East

⁸⁰ One Essex farmer, in evidence to the *Select Committee on Agricultural Customs* (PP.1847-8, vii), p.141 claimed there was "hardly a tenant in the county who dare ask his landlord to build him anything".

⁸¹ In 1867, for example, G. Capel Cure was supplying pipes and tiles at Bovington Hall and Ongar Park farms while tenants dug the drains. E.R.O. Capel Cure MSS. D/DCc E5.

⁸² E.R.O. Guy's Hospital MSS., Receiver's Reports for the Essex estate. D/DGh E7. Cressing Farm, "much improved by the tenant", and the Birch estate near Colchester provide further examples. E.R.O. Porter MSS. D/DPo E11; E.R.O. Round MSS. D/DR E16.

⁸³ Col. Bramston of Skreens (west of Chelmsford), for example, and G. Capel Cure (Ongar).

⁸⁴ W. Fisher Hobbs, for example, who bred shire horses and pigs and was a founder member of the Royal Agricultural Society. R.G.E Wood, *SEAX 7: Agriculture in Essex, 1840-1900*, E.R.O. Publications (Chelmsford, 1975). No.12.

Anglian landlords.⁸⁵ In their defence it can be said that landlords remained active in initiating and running those county and local agricultural improvement societies that arranged lectures, shows, ploughing matches and visits to model farms. A group of leading Essex landowners lobbied successfully to host the Royal Agricultural Society's annual show at Chelmsford in 1856⁸⁶ and landowners were active members of both the Essex Agricultural Association (begun in the wake of the Chelmsford show) and the Essex Chamber of Agriculture (1867).⁸⁷ But none of this was done with conspicuous panache; it amounts to hardly more than would be expected even of apathetic landlords. Tenant farmers became openly critical of their landlords' lacklustre leadership in the 1840s, especially in responding to the Anti-Corn Law League, and mounted a minor but significant challenge by initiating the Essex Agricultural Protection Society, "organized by farmers for farmers".⁸⁸ Muted opposition to the Anti-Corn Law League might, of course, be interpreted as prudent foresight and this evidence is perhaps no more damaging to the landlords' reputation than the perennial accounts of estates being neglected to over-indulge in public service⁸⁹ or personal dissipation.⁹⁰ But there was certainly no diminution in

⁸⁵ See, e.g. A.F.J. Brown, *Essex at Work, 1700-1815* (Chelmsford, 1969), p.33.

⁸⁶ Wood, *op.cit.* No.9

⁸⁷ However, they cannot be said to have dominated Chamber meetings. *Essex Chamber of Agriculture Minute Book, 1869-80*. Writtle Agricultural College Historical Collection.

⁸⁸ *Essex County Standard* 15th Dec. 1843; T.L. Crosby, *English Farmers and the Politics of Protection* (Hassocks, Sussex, 1977), pp.127, 130-1.

⁸⁹ Richard Wingfield-Baker (Orsett, 8545 acres), for example, was, at various times, Liberal MP for south Essex, High Sheriff, chairman of the county quarter sessions, local magistrate, and Captain Commandant of the Second Essex Volunteers. He also erected the Orsett Institute, in 1860, and financed the restoration of two local churches. E.J.T. Collins, *The History of the Orsett Estate, 1743-1914* (Thurrock, 1978), pp. 25-6.

⁹⁰ Wingfield-Baker employed three game keepers and four grooms. The whole local community was invited to celebrate his son's coming-of-age and in 1878

complaints of this kind either, and failure to persuade tenants of the appropriate response to the Anti-Corn Law League is perhaps further evidence of a partial retreat from the landowners' traditional leadership role.

If the reputation of Essex farmers emerges better from such examination than that of landlords it is more because they manifested fewer shortcomings than because they displayed particular managerial skills. Landlords transferred some of their responsibilities to tenants including initiating investment (above, pp.22-3), but the burden was taken up without noticeable enthusiasm or innovation because tenants too preferred incremental change. Few Essex farmers could be described as scientific agriculturalists and few showed much interest in agricultural education. Like the landlords they were frequently accused of social extravagance, of neglecting their farms, and there was perhaps substance to such complaints. Some left much of the day-to-day management to a farm foreman, and one local commentator, less censorious than most, described a "new generation of farmers ... a cultured class... they had taste"⁹¹ He judged the comfortable lifestyle of certain Orsett farmers beyond the reach of the local doctor,⁹² and a surviving farmer's diary (1871) from this part of the county details a hectic social life of concerts, dances, card parties,

the Volunteers and allotment holders were entertained to dinner. The diaries of Sir Thomas Barrett-Lennard (3691 acres, Belhus, south Essex) indicate numerous visits to London, to the theatre (sometimes accompanied by tenants), to the seaside and abroad. A hunting, shooting man, his sporting interests included breeding horses, harriers, beagles, greyhounds and deer, and keeping the South Essex pack. Collins *ibid*; E.R.O. Barrett-Lennard MSS. Diaries D/DL F179, 21/9,230, C68; E.R.O. Whitmore MSS. Suggestions as to reducing expenditure at Orsett Hall (1883) D/DWt/S; 1. Sparkes (ed.) *Belhus* (1964), pp.50-2.

⁹¹ E.H. Rowley, 'Further Extracts from the Memoirs of the late E.H. Rowley, Esq.' *Panorama*, VI (1961), p.4.

⁹² *Ibid.* p.4; *idem.* 'Their Very Life and Existence', unpublished work (n.d.) Thurrock Public Library, CR 11730, Box 4, pp. 60-2.

hunting and steeple-chasing.⁹³ The eventual consequences of such indulgence, and reluctance to adjust to harder times after 1873, have been frequently mentioned in accounts of the succeeding depression in East Anglia, not least in comparisons between the fortunes of local farmers and those of the more abstemious, hard-grafting, incomers from Scotland and Lancashire.⁹⁴

One particular manifestation of tenant conservatism was continued indifference to what happened to their produce beyond the farm gate: they were production managers rather than entrepreneurs. At mid-century Essex produce found its way to consumers via archaic local and metropolitan marketing arrangements characterized by diversity in ownership, regulation, tolls and even measurements.⁹⁵ Rising population, and the railways, prompted rationalization and improvement: several London markets were enlarged or re-located and the role of middlemen was enhanced. A handful of Essex farmers and smallholders participated in this transformation⁹⁶ but it occurred for the most part uninfluenced, and perhaps unnoticed, by Essex farmers. Local newspapers and the records of the Essex Chamber of Agriculture contain very few complaints or

⁹³ L. Thompson, 'How an Orsett Farmer Enjoyed Himself in 1871', *Essex Countryside*, IX. No.46 (1960), pp.24-5.

⁹⁴ The *Preston Guardian* of 26th October, 1896, for example, alleged that Essex farmers had been slow to innovate and resistant to change not only in the depression but also in the preceding 'golden age'. See also the evidence of Essex land agent, A. Darby, to the 1894-7 *Royal Commission on Agricultural Depression*, (P.P.1896, XVII), QQ59074, 59250-1. "Dozens lived well and attended Chelmsford and other markets in the course of the week when they need not have attended one; they have dined well and enjoyed themselves and gone home comfortable. Well, that is not farming; that is spending money."

⁹⁵ For details see Pam, loc.cit., Chap. 3.

⁹⁶ Collison Hall, in the milk trade, for example, Atkins, loc.cit p.220. Thomas Ridgewell of Orsett and Robert Wagstaffe of South Ockendon, market gardeners, sold for other producers on commission. Evidence of R. Wagstaffe to the House of Commons Committee on London, Tilbury and Southend Railway Bill (H/C 1883 42a); E.H. Rowley 'Their Very Life and Existence', p33.

comments on marketing arrangements and there appears to have been no attempt to initiate co-operative marketing, or any other kind of farm co-operation, until later in the century.

VI: PRUDENCE VINDICATED?

Thus it is possible to construct a seemingly damning indictment against landlords and farmers alike. Further evidence, however, exonerates, or partly exonerates, Essex men from several of these charges. The case for their defence must begin with the vigorous critique of 'high farming' by F.M.L. Thompson and others that depicts much of it as massive over-investment in 'state-of-the-art' agriculture, impressive in scale and ingenuity but decidedly unimpressive when judged by economic criteria. Consequently, we are told, many activities barely paid even on soils for which they were best-suited, which is why so much 'high farming' was abandoned when the 'golden' years yielded to depression. Where lavish investment was targeted upon cereal yields, it is said to have been doubly foolish because cereal production was already threatened by imports. From this perspective it was perhaps as well that Essex boasted relatively few high-farming apostles like farmers Prout and Mechi (above p.17), whose accounts were frequently challenged by more conservative Essex farmers.⁹⁷ If there was, as Thompson argues,⁹⁸ a 'last expensive homage to king corn', Essex men, although loyal to corn, avoided most of the expense. This by no means is to claim that they were exceptionally competent, or well-informed, that each potential investment had been carefully appraised before rejection. Merely that they

⁹⁷ Chambers and Mingay (op.cit. p.175) cite Mechi's claims uncritically but many Essex farmers maintained that Mechi's methods were uneconomic on the London clays. Criticism of his accounts and methods was commonplace in the *Essex County Standard*: see, for example, 19th and 26th Dec. 1851, 30th Mar. 1860. See also ERO T/2 20/35, 114/1-2.

⁹⁸ Thompson, op.cit. p.246.

should not be castigated for failing to exploit investment opportunities that were likely to have proved spurious.

Not all opportunities were spurious of course, some 'high farming' investment yielded good returns. To what extent were worthwhile investment opportunities foregone out of apathy or shortsightedness? Drainage is customarily given prominence among investment of this kind: yet investment under this heading in Essex was very modest (above pp.17-19). One reason for this was the belief that extensive drainage investment on the clays, while undoubtably beneficial, was not sufficiently worthwhile to repay the considerable expense. Certain mid-century enthusiasts had proclaimed drainage the sovereign remedy for heavy soils.⁹⁹ The new mass-produced clay drainpipes, they claimed, could transform once-soggy fields, break the "long stranglehold of naked fallows", allow the introduction of green crops and increased cattle and sheep, and generally facilitate successful 'stock and corn' farming on traditional wheat and bean lands.¹⁰⁰ In fact, within the technical constraints of the time, much clayland was not nearly so adaptable. Not only were turnips, other fodder crops and barley unlikely to flourish on the heavier soils, no matter how expensively drained, much other Essex land required considerable supplementary investment in marling and manuring, and the sustained co-operation of tenants, to create anything resembling the classic 'stock and corn' regime.¹⁰¹ Bare fallows remained essential to clean and rest the heavier land. Moreover, while claypipe drainage could produce reasonable returns on fair and middling land that was previously undrained, much of Essex was already tolerably drained. R. Barker, in 1843, described hollow-drain underdraining, much of it in place since the mid-eighteenth century, extending over

⁹⁹ For example, J.J. Mechi, *Letters on Agricultural Improvement* (1845) or J.R. Dent (1860), cited in Sturgess, loc.cit., p. 119.

¹⁰⁰ Thompson, op.cit. p.248.

¹⁰¹ Collins and Jones, loc.cit. pp. 70-1.

some two-thirds of the county.¹⁰² Barker maintained that hollow drains were durable and on Essex soils might prove more successful than the newer tile or pipe drains which, unless used with gravel and cockle shells, "do not answer well".¹⁰³ The tithe file reports indicated that much drainage had been undertaken on the boulder clays in the 1830s and noted a need for additional drainage in only 39 parishes.¹⁰⁴ Of course, traditional methods, of limited effectiveness with surface water, were never more than a partial solution to draining the heavy clays but the new pipe and tile technology offered only limited further advantage. The fundamental difficulty was cost: effective drainage of heavy land was inordinately expensive. One recent commentator estimated that converting Essex clays to pasture cost over three times as much as conversion in Cheshire or Staffordshire and also required several years more to produce good grazing turf.¹⁰⁵ It was calculations of this kind more than unthinking conservatism, the logic of high costs and poor returns, that led Essex farmers to declare that land still undrained in 1870 was not worth draining.¹⁰⁶

Expenditure on machinery, particularly steam cultivation, was everywhere less successful than investment in drainage and Essex farmers had reason to appraise this aspect of 'high farming' with particular caution. Machinery economized on labour but savings were likely to be marginal where wages were as low, and labour as plentiful, as they were in much of Essex. So plentiful was labour that a man displaced by

¹⁰² In Philip Pusey (ed.) 'Evidence on the Cheapness and Efficiency of Thorough Draining or Land Ditching' *Jrnl. Roy. Ag. Soc. Engl.* IV (1843), pp. 35-41. Ernle (op.cit. pp. 358, 366) noted the extent and effectiveness of drainage in Essex before mid-century. Phillips' recent work (op.cit. p.44) confirms this impression.

¹⁰³ Barker in Pusey (ed.) loc.cit. p.37.

¹⁰⁴ Tithe files. PRO. IR, 18 series.

¹⁰⁵ Sturgess, loc.cit. (1966), p.112.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid. p.113.

machinery might leave his employer with higher poor rates besides a bad conscience.¹⁰⁷ Clearly this was less likely to occur on the metropolitan fringes of Essex (where 'high farming', as well as high wages, were more commonplace, above p.21) but to the east and north of London the wage contours were closely-spaced: the mid-century *Morning Chronicle* survey recorded north Essex wages "extremely low", the labourers too poor to afford meat.¹⁰⁸ Labourers' wages, and farmers' labour costs, rose throughout the 'golden age', but no faster in Essex than elsewhere.¹⁰⁹ early in the twentieth century wages in villages barely thirty miles from London - Stansted, Halstead and Steeple Bumpstead for example - were among the lowest in England.¹¹⁰ Another local characteristic that discouraged investment, especially in conversion to pasture, was climate. Low rainfall, like the warm Essex summers, was far more a handicap to pasture farming than to arable: "in the dry east and south of the county permanent pasture was a precarious crop".¹¹¹ In reasonable years, in

¹⁰⁷ Caird's mid-century figures on poor relief per-head show the burden in Essex exceeded that in all but five other counties. Labourers' wages there are shown some 15 per cent below the average for England. Caird, *op.cit.* pp.512,514. On labour abundance in southern England see E.H. Hunt, 'Labour Productivity in English Agriculture, 1850-1914', *Ec. Hist. Rev.* XX (1967); E.J.T. Collins, 'The "Rationality" of Surplus Agricultural Labour: Mechanization in English Agriculture in the Nineteenth Century', *Ag. Hist. Rev.* XXXV (1987).

¹⁰⁸ E.H. Hunt, *Regional Wage Variations in Britain, 1850-1914* (Oxford, 1973), p.10.

¹⁰⁹ E.H. Hunt, 'Industrialization and Regional Inequality: Wages in Britain, 1760-1914', *Journal of Economic History*, XLVI (1986), pp.942-48.

¹¹⁰ Hunt, *op.cit.* p11.

¹¹¹ Sturgess, *loc.cit* (1966), p.112. "On a great deal of the land permanent pasture does not flourish on account of the dryness of the climate" W. Bear, 'Advantages in Agricultural Production', *Jrnl. Roy. Ag. Soc. Engl.* LV (1894), p263. Root crops too were less likely to flourish in the drier areas.

fact, neither too wet nor dry, much of Essex produced excellent cereal crops and even the heavier clays, unsuitable for fodder crops, produced a satisfactory wheat harvest.

In these circumstances, a cautious and sceptical response to advocates of 'high farming' and dairying, such as Caird, is certainly defensible. It would have required unequivocal and sustained price signals to induce rational men to abandon farming that was suited to local soil and climate and, in most years, producing adequate returns. On the heavy Essex soils significantly reduced dependence on cereals entailed prodigious expenditure, several years of reduced income, and commitment to unfamiliar farming that might prove no less precarious, and no more profitable, than the time-honoured wheat and bean cultivation. Were market indicators, despite these manifold impediments to change, sufficiently emphatic to indicate what F.M.L. Thompson called the "proper" adjustment of farming to the marketing possibilities of the 'golden age'?¹¹² If incentives to restructure were insufficiently compelling, continuity possibly owed more to prudence than to apathy. According to Thompson, wheat prices, after their recovery in 1853-5, "settled down to a slowly declining trend" while "the prices of animal products continued to rise steadily".¹¹³ In fact, neither trend was so clear. In the five years leading up to Corn Law repeal wheat prices (graph 1) had hovered between 50s. and 58s. a quarter.¹¹⁴ They were very high in the following year (69s. 9d.) and then fell to a miserable 38s. 6d. in 1851. Caird's pamphlet advocating 'high farming' as the best substitute for protection had recently appeared¹¹⁵ and the calamitous price sequence appeared to vindicate both the gloomy prophecies voiced at the time of corn law repeal and Caird's recommended

¹¹² Thompson, op.cit. p.255.

¹¹³ Ibid p.245

¹¹⁴ Wheat prices from Mitchell and Deane, op.cit. pp. 488-9. Essex prices followed the national pattern.

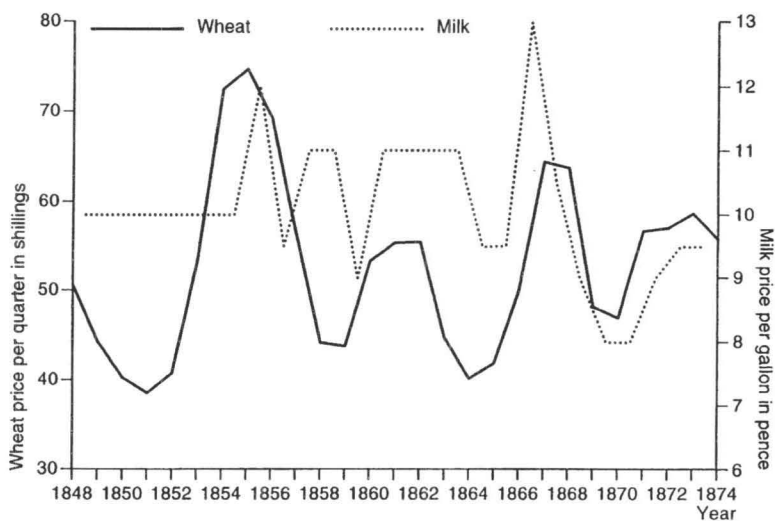
¹¹⁵ *High Farming under Liberal Covenants: The Best Substitute for Protection*, (1849). There were eight editions.

remedy. If Essex farmers and landlords were not at that time contemplating how their heavy corn-land might be coaxed into producing grass and fodder, they richly deserve all the opprobrium subsequently heaped upon them. But 1851 was the nadir: wheat was not to be so cheap again until the mid-1880s. By 1853 its price was back above 50s. a quarter and then, for three years, moved higher than at any time since 1819. The subsequent fall lasted only until 1857 and, after further fluctuations, wheat prices in the early seventies were on a par with levels in the 1840s and quite high enough for viable production on the Essex clays. This sequence is consistent with a relative decline in wheat prices having occurred (above pp.12-13) but claims that prices fell absolutely in the 'golden age' are unwarranted.

As noted earlier (above, pp.12-13), meat prices were indeed more buoyant than wheat prices and their relative increase, although gradual and intermittent, should perhaps have prompted Essex landlords and farmers at least to investigate the feasibility and cost of increased stocking. Milk prices, however, appear to lend less support to Professor Thompson's¹¹⁶ suppositions about price trends for animal products and the nature of "proper adjustment" (above p.31). Initial investigation of milk prices in the London area, using the records of St. Bartholomew's Hospital,¹¹⁷ shows the price

¹¹⁶ Many others, of course, have made similar assumptions about milk prices: eg. D. Taylor in 'The English Dairy Industry, 1860-1930', *Ag.Hist.Rev.* XXII (1974), p.156 and E.J.T. Collins and E.L. Jones (note 118 below).

¹¹⁷ St. Bartholomew's Hospital Archives. Governors' minutes 1849/50-1913/14, Ha/1/21-29. Until 1860 the hospital obtained most of its milk from nearby Islington. Subsequently it was supplied from South Weald (near Brentwood) in Essex. The figures that follow therefore combine London prices and Brentwood prices: the course of milk prices in Brentwood over the whole period may have been a little more buoyant than the following account suggests. St. Thomas's Hospital obtained milk from the Romford district as early as 1846 but no evidence of its price has been found prior to 1855. Figures for St. Thomas's published in *Report on Wholesale and Retail Prices* (P.P. 1903 LXVIII), p.137 are broadly consistent with those for St. Bartholomew's cited above.



Sources: Wheat prices, Mitchell and Deane op.cit. pp. 488-9
Milk prices, St. Bartholomew's Hospital Archives,
Governor's minutes, HA/1/21-9

steady between 1849 and 1855 around 10*d.* a gallon. Subsequently the price fluctuated, reaching as much as 1*s.* 1*d.* at the time of the cattle plague (1866/7), but remaining *below* 10*d.* for most of the period 1864-73. Better evidence, and in particular evidence on prices received in Essex in the 1850s, is required.¹¹⁸ But on the basis of the evidence presently available there was very little incentive for Essex men to turn to dairying as the much-lauded migrant Scots farmers were to do later in the century.¹¹⁹

The course of milk prices during the 'golden age' (graph) is both interesting and unanticipated: most commentators have assumed that rising population, rising incomes, income-elastic demand, and the absence of overseas competition, were conducive to

¹¹⁸ The authors would be grateful for any information on the location of milk price series for Essex, and other counties. Atkins provides a useful series of London *retail* prices which, like the St. Bartholomew's Hospital series, shows long periods when prices were unchanged and no evidence of any persistent rise: he emphasizes their long-term stability. P.J. Atkins, 'The Retail Milk Trade in London, c. 1790-1914', *Ec.H.R.* XXXIII (1980), p.532. E.J.T. Collins and E.L. Jones (*Ag. Hist. Rev.* (1967), p.79), citing evidence from the *Report on Wholesale and Retail Prices* (P.P. 1903 LXVIII, pp.136-7), claim there was a clear long-term rise in milk prices between 1851-5 and 1871-5. However this claim appears to rest mainly on evidence from only one of the two price series in the 1903 report, that of the Royal Bethlem Hospital, London, and is not supported by evidence of price movements at St. Thomas's Hospital cited in the same source. The St. Thomas's figures (beginning in 1855) show milk prices after the mid-1860s distinctly below the Royal Bethlem prices, while the Royal Bethlem figures for the beginning of the 'golden age' are equally clearly below those paid by St. Bartholomew's Hospital (graph above). The level and movement of the St. Thomas's and St. Bartholomew's series are broadly similar and together raise doubts about the Royal Bethlem series. Between 1855-9 and 1870-4 the Royal Bethlem figures indicate that milk prices rose by 31 per cent whereas the St. Bartholomew's and St. Thomas's series indicate price falls of 13 per cent and 3 per cent respectively.

¹¹⁹ Whether it would have been technically possible to do this in the 'golden age' is another question and one we hope to address in a subsequent publication.

rising milk prices: Caird, in 1868, claimed dairy produce prices had increased by half since 1850.¹²⁰ Possibly Essex and London milk prices fell relative to prices received by dairy farmers more distant from the capital.¹²¹ In the 1840s home county farmers enjoyed a monopoly of milk carried into London. As railway expansion opened up this market the advantage of proximity was diminished, perhaps reducing the differential between London and provincial milk prices at the same time. While this intriguing possibility remains to be explored, the evidence already cited helps to explain, and justify, the very slow expansion of dairy farming in Essex. Improving transport likewise exposed Essex meat producers to greater competition from distant counties that were more suited to stock raising. Some of the cattle and sheep at one time seen in Essex were there only because they needed to replenish weight lost on the long trek from upland Britain.¹²² In carrying animals (or country-killed meat) direct to London markets with little weight-loss, railways reduced the importance of home-county fattening¹²³ and thus help to explain why rising meat prices during the 'golden age' were accompanied by only modestly increased stock-keeping in Essex. With regard to both milk and meat, therefore, the consequences for Essex farming of greater inter-regional competition were contrary to those more-widely recognized influences of growing international competition that shaped Caird's analysis: improved transport on the prairies and north Atlantic encouraged English farmers to abandon

¹²⁰ Cited in Jones, *op.cit.* p.198.

¹²¹ T.W. Fletcher (in P.J. Perry (ed.) *British Agriculture, 1875-1914* (1973), pp.87-9, 104-5) suggests milk prices in Lancashire may have risen in the 1860s and 1870s.

¹²² Essex markets were the chief centres to which Welsh cattle were driven. D.W. Howell, *Land and People in Nineteenth-Century Wales* (1978), p.116.

¹²³ The traditional distinction between rearing and fattening counties derived from several considerations besides the need to replenish weight lost in driving animals to London and was by no means eradicated.

corn, but improved internal transport encouraged many Essex farmers to do exactly the opposite.

VII: Conclusions

The most remarkable feature of Essex farming during the 'golden age' was how little it changed. Here, as we have seen, the textbook high-farming, high-spending, landlords were a rare minority. Nor was the so-called 'golden age' particularly prosperous: not for most Essex farmers and emphatically not for their landlords. Some change occurred of course, but in 1870 farming practice in Essex was recognizably what it had been at mid-century, milk and meat production scarcely less subservient to corn.

Essex evidence therefore offers scant support for the traditional interpretation of the 'golden age'. But neither does it endorse more recent interpretations that emphasize the tardiness of response to market pressures in much of English agriculture, allegedly because landlords and farmers were either apathetic or devoted too much of their high-farming energies towards increasing cereal yields. Essex agriculturalists cannot be exonerated from all charges of ignorance, indolence, and inertia: doubtless some opportunities were missed.¹²⁴ But the criticism has been overdone because while

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Whether the landlords or the farmers have been the less-unfairly castigated is debated. Chambers and Mingay (*op.cit.* p.163) and F.M.L. Thompson (*op.cit.* p.255) incline towards portraying landlords in the more sympathetic light with emphasis on short-sighted tenants declining to adopt improvements that landlords would willingly finance. For Essex, however, it was suggested above (pp.22-5) that such evidence can at least be matched by evidence of similar shortcomings among landlords. The landlords, after all, should have been more aware than humble tenant farmers of costs, opportunities and long-term market trends; they should have read more, kept better accounts, and alerted farmers to the potential benefits of co-operative marketing. Even the more impecunious among them could normally raise loans for improvements, and worthwhile improvements were reflected in rent

modest investment and hesitant structural change may appear to be the predictable outcome of conservatism, it was, no less, the strategy indicated by rational appraisal. In Essex, that is, conservatism and enlightenment were fortuitously in harmony. The correct course may sometimes have been followed for the wrong reasons, but it would be churlish to suggest that informed, or intuitive, assessment of the costs and benefits of innovation¹²⁵ was not equally important in explaining why landlords and farmers acted as they did.

It has been argued that the Essex preference for continuity over radical change was rational for three main reasons. Firstly, because drainage and many other high-farming innovations were particularly unrewarding on the Essex-clays. Poor returns were especially likely when investment was directed at converting arable land to pasture and the Essex climate and plentiful labour were further disincentives to innovation. Secondly, market indicators, usually assumed to have been urging greater emphasis on mixed farming or pasture, were by no means so clear nor so unequivocal. Long-term trends in the price of milk hardly amounted to a proclamation that arable should be laid to grass, and wheat prices, rather than embarking upon "a slowly declining trend" (above p.31), exhibited no clear long-term trend. Wheat prices fluctuated at levels that produced tolerable (even if not 'golden') returns in most years and offered no sustained indication that it was unwise to persist in patterns of farming that were well-trying and well-adapted to the Essex environment. Thirdly, throughout the 'golden age' improving transport eroded the advantages of proximity that Essex

returns. For tenant farmers, by contrast, differential rents (above p.14) provided another disincentive to innovation by neutralizing price trends that favoured livestock. Both Essex landlords and Essex farmers performed better than their reputations imply, but it is probably the reputation of farmers that most needs revision.

¹²⁵

See, for example, the case of improvements on one Essex estate, proposed and subsequently cancelled, mentioned by F.M.L. Thompson. (op.cit. p.253).

once enjoyed in supplying milk and meat to London. Mounting competition from regions where soil and climate gave comparative advantage to pasture and mixed farming caused market indicators favouring milk and meat to be more muted in Essex than elsewhere. In cereals Essex still retained a comparative advantage over most of England, even if its advantage over the American prairies was under challenge. And so Essex farmers and landlords invested modestly, moved only very tentatively towards milk and meat, and continued to produce traditional crops by traditional methods.

To what extent these Essex findings should influence understanding of English agriculture as a whole in the 'golden age' cannot be ascertained from this investigation alone. Certainly Essex was not unique: other studies have unearthed tantalizing hints that much of what has been said of Essex might apply no less to certain other places, particularly to other heavy-soil areas in the south and east. Evidence of maintained or expanded arable acreage, for example, has been found for Sussex, Buckinghamshire, Bedfordshire, Northants, Wiltshire and Derbyshire.¹²⁶ Likewise, levels of expenditure on drainage in Norfolk, Suffolk, Sussex, Berkshire and Hampshire seem likely, as in Essex, to have been incompatible with textbook accounts of landlord extravagance.¹²⁷ Holderness found little evidence of exceptional expenditure on farm buildings anywhere in Norfolk and Suffolk,¹²⁸ and when the senior bursar of St. John's College, Cambridge later complained of insufficient

¹²⁶ R.J.P. Kain and H.C. Prince *The Tithe Surveys of England and Wales* (Cambridge, 1985), p.173; Perren 'The Landlord and Agricultural Transformation, 1870-1900', *Ag.Hist.Rev.* XVIII (1970), p.50; F.M.L. Thompson in *Victoria County History of Wiltshire* (iv) 1959, p.97; A.M.D. Phillips, 'Agricultural Land Use on a Northamptonshire Estate (1849-99) as Revealed by Cropping Books', *East Midlands Geographer*, VIII, pt.3 (June 1983), 75-7.

¹²⁷ Phillips, *op.cit.* Table 3-4, p.81.

¹²⁸ B.A. Holderness, 'Landlord's Capital Formation in East Anglia, 1750-1870', *Ec.H.R.* XXV (1972), Table 2, p.439.

investment in the 'golden age' the college's Essex farms were not distinguished from those in other countries.¹²⁹ At the very least, there appears to be widespread, if still fragmentary, support for Collins and Jones' suggestion that innovation and investment on the claylands during the 'golden age' was far less than that which transformed farming on the lighter soils in the first half of the century (above n.53). One obvious response to the Essex evidence might be to observe that any detailed investigation is bound to discover deviations from the textbook stereotypes. After all, there were parishes in Essex with sufficient 'high farming', dairying, or market gardening to provide local historians with grounds for questioning the conclusions of the present investigation. The contention here, however, is that because the Essex experience differed so significantly from that depicted in generalized accounts, because Essex represents a sizeable exception to any such generalization, and because Essex farming had some aspects in common with farming elsewhere, the familiar interpretations of English agriculture in the 'golden age', qualified as they are compared with older textbook accounts, may require yet more qualification.

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St. John's College, Cambridge, MSS., Senior Bursar's Statement on the Audit, 1893, D100-70. The college estates are detailed in H.F. Howard, *Finances of St. John's College, Cambridge, 1511-1926* (Cambridge, 1935), end map.

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