Farm Developments in nineteenth Century Suffolk. Richard Glass.
Suffolk can claim many ‘firsts’ in farming development from Jethro Tull’s drills to Charles Poppy’s original farmers’ club, Arthur Young’s statistics, Garrett’s engines and Fison’s fertilisers. New livestock breeds became associated with the county including the Black Faced sheep, the Suffolk Punch horse, Red Poll Cattle and Black Pig. Improved plant types included Chevalier Barley which rapidly became the dominant strain in British cultivation. interest was also given
to fruit growing with the Greengage, lady
Heniker’s Pear, and a regional apple evolving
in suffolk. The region produced secretaries
and governors of the leading national and
regional agricultural organisations.
the establishment of the extent to which the
county was at the forefront of agricultural
change and innovation in the mid-nineteenth
century is one of the aims of this research.
Nationally farming was becoming increasingly
commercialised and one indication of this
is the adoption of industrial-style premises.
Model farms were built, from scratch, to plans
drawn up by architects and agriculturalists.
they were widely publicised and readers of
The Farmers’ Magazine and The Journal of the
Royal Agricultural Society of England could see
plans and engravings of the finished complexes
as well as learn about their productivity and
effectiveness. New machinery was employed,
using new sources of power, New fertilisers
were utilised. this whole enterprise was housed
in large purpose-built, specialised model farms,
or farmeries. they were expensive to create and
depended upon highly capitalised landlords,
or individual farmers of vision. New buildings
included covered stockyards, ventilated dairies,
narrow gauge rail systems, underground
manure tanks and engine/wheel houses.
Experimental farms were run by some
of the larger agricultural associations and
tested out some of the new ideas publicised
in the name of high farming. they too were
expensive, but in the maintenance rather than
the founding as they were more likely to be
adaptations of existing facilities rather than
entirely new constructions. these farms carried
out carefully planned experiments designed
to test the effectiveness of high farming’s new
techniques. Such exercises may have involved
the yield of crop and animal varieties, efficiency
of new machinery and power sources, fertiliser
improvement both natural and man-made, soil
improvement and drainage. Such experimental
farms, run by the national agricultural
bodies of England and Scotland, were
investigative in nature and the trial results were reported
in widely read periodicals.
tenant farmers had access to these changes
via the professional literature, national and local
newspapers, and the network of local farmers’
clubs and societies. Such clubs of which there
were several in Suffolk, ran libraries, lectures,
visits and discussions. this flow of information
was lubricated in the mid 800s by rapid
developments in printing technology, progress
in image reproduction, rapid expansion of the
railway and telegraph networks.
through these means small farmers were
exposed to the new ways in farming and many
were inclined to adopt some features of high
farming. Not all practitioners were convinced
however, and debate between practical and
theoretical farmers filled many letters’ pages
in local and regional newspapers. the bona fide
Suffolk farmer found the forces of high farming
much easier to resist than the forward looking
experimentalist. those small farmers who
did take on the new methods opened up the
possibility of radical change in their workplace,
surroundings and techniques.
the extent to which farmers invested in new
buildings was by no means consistent across the
county of Suffolk. the change in farmsteads was
piecemeal and incremental rather than radical
and wholesale. Examples of model farming were
instigated in Suffolk by the aristocracy (Duke
of Grafton) large landowners (Chevalier) and
entrepreneurs (Webb).
the methods employed to investigate
the Victorian farm changes in Suffolk were
threefold. Firstly, a sample was drawn up
representing the three main soil types found
in the county. these samples represented a
range of farm sizes and tenures. the farm
buildings were visited, sketched, measured and
photographed. the farms were then located on
the 1830 tithe Survey maps as well as the 840
ordnance Survey maps. Scale drawings were
made of the farms and buildings from these map
sources. By this range of methods it was hoped
that changing patterns of fields and buildings in
the period of so called high farming would be
revealed. in particular how far was development
and change limited by physical factors. overall
50 farms were investigated, based upon the
three core areas of Bury St Edmunds, *Hadleigh,*
and Wickham Market. Each of these represents a
discrete and successful farmers’ club catchment
area, based respectively upon Sand/Chalk,
alluvium, and Clay/Sand.
the data thus collected was presented as a
set of maps, sketches, photographs and graphs.
overall a number of trends were noted with
some interesting differences both between and
within the three sample areas.
Fields were categorised as having become
more or less regular in shape, and smaller or
larger. the degree to which buildings become
more or less regular was also assessed. the
result should be therefore an analysis of the
to which Victorian farm buildings and fields
became more geometric and spacious during the
drive toward greater efficiency and intensity in
the nineteenth century.
in all three areas the number of scattered
buildings dropped by half and linear farmsteads
vanished. all three areas also show a marked
move toward geometric arrangements of
buildings. this clearly charts the evolution of the
courtyard farm.
there were great regional differences.
the area of late enclosure around Bury St
Edmunds was already dominated by huge
planned complexes by 830. Change in the
Hadleigh and Wickham Market area was much
more piecemeal with a development toward
the geometric symmetrical ideal of modern
efficiency.
Field shapes and sizes appear to have
remained more stable, with fewer obvious
changes than in the buildings. there was a ten
to fifteen percent change in the size of fields and
their shape. this remodelling was consistently
to regularise field shapes and increase their size
and was more likely in the areas of small fields
and early enclosure in the heavy clays than in
the light soils of Breckland and the Sandlings.