

English interwar farming: a study of the financial outcomes of individual farms, 1919-1939

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by

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Abstract

The interwar years were particularly harsh for the farming community. The big upsurge of prices during the Great War was quickly reversed in 1920-1921. Government considered the plight of farming in 1923 but, when this improved, continued laissez-faire policies throughout the 1920s. However, they became interventionist in 1932-1933, first with subsidies for wheat and then later with cattle and other grain products.

There is scant research into the profitability of the different branches of farming. While there is reasonable historiography for the 1920s, there is very little detailed information about the fortunes of farming in the 1930s, a gap which this thesis has filled. This study is based on 35 studies of profitability of individual farming operations, and it uniquely offers an insight into the *minutiae* of farming in the interwar years. Apart from identifying individual trends of the components of arable and livestock farming, it also evidences benefits of specialisation or competitive edge where these were found.

After the price adjustment of 1920-1921, mixed farming was the first to become unprofitable due to increasing imports from major grain producing countries. Cattle were the next to come under pressure from the Meat Trusts of North America. Milk had its problems too, so no sector was immune during the study period. The 1930s were almost universally harsh for farming, with the exception of cattle grazing in the second half of that decade. Where in earlier times there may have been a greater degree of commonality of outcomes with mixed farming at the fore, this later period saw a divergence in farmers' fortunes, which this thesis articulates.

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Contents

	Page
<u>Chapter 1</u> Introduction, definition of the study area, methodology and gazetteer of farms studied.	11
<u>Chapter 2</u> The farming background: economic and other trends, 1850-1918.	34
<u>Chapter 3</u> The macro-economics of farming in the interwar period: an overview.	61
<u>Chapter 4</u> A crisis looming: ‘betrayals’, deflation and drift up to the eve of the Wall Street crash: 1919-1928 with case-studies.	90
<u>Chapter 5</u> Crisis: Government intervention and limited recovery: 1929-1939 with case-studies.	230
<u>Chapter 6</u> Conclusion.	337
<u>Bibliography and acknowledgements</u>	353

List of Figures

Chapter 1

- 1.1 *The Midland Plan or Midland Clays area* 23
- 1.2 *Map showing the location of the 35 farms in the study area* 30

Chapter 2

- 2.1 *Agricultural rent in England, 1845-1910* 35
- 2.2 *Wheat imports into the United Kingdom, 1850-1915* 38
- 2.3 *Corn prices in England, 1875-1910* 39
- 2.4 *Indices of wheat, wool, livestock and milk prices, and trends, 1875-1893* 40
- 2.5 *Farm-workers' wages, 1860-1903* 41
- 2.6 *Percentage of land under arable cultivation in Britain, 1875-1935* 42
- 2.7 *Farm sale prices, 1859-1914* 44
- 2.8 *Indicative trends of RPI and farming incomes, 1871-1911* 47
- 2.9 *Indices of wages and wheat price at Crouch Farm, alongside the cost of living, 1914-1918* 55

Chapter 3

- 3.1 *UK Economy, 1920s and 1930s* 62
- 3.2 *General and agricultural GDP growth, 1921-1938* 62
- 3.3 *General and agricultural GDP growth and trends, 1932-1938* 64
- 3.4 *The 1930 depression compared with the 2008 recession* 64
- 3.5 *Comparison of general wholesale and agricultural prices, 1920-1938* 65
- 3.6 *Bank base rates, 1919-1938* 66
- 3.7 *Prices and wages indices, 1916-1942* 66
- 3.8 *Index of consumer expenditure at 1913 prices, 1920-1942* 67
- 3.9 *Population of England and Wales, 1921-1939* 67
- 3.10 *Food price index and expenditure statistics, 1916-1938* 68
- 3.11 *Agricultural income data, England and Wales, 1920-1938* 69
- 3.12 *Real wages, per Butchart, 1932-1938* 69
- 3.13 *Agricultural wage rates from other sources, 1917-1935* 70
- 3.14 *Numbers employed in agriculture, 1920-1938* 71
- 3.15 *UK unemployment 1920s and 1930s* 71
- 3.16 *Butchart's chart showing non-employment compared with unemployment* 72
- 3.17 *Trends of permanent grass and arable in Great Britain, 1914-1942* 74
- 3.18 *Percentage of grass in five counties, 1918-1939* 75
- 3.19 *Output of the three main corn crops in Great Britain, 1914-1939* 76
- 3.20 *Wheat acreage in Great Britain, 1914-1939* 76
- 3.21 *Percentage of wheat in five counties, 1918-1939* 77
- 3.22 *Annual average prices of wheat, barley and oats, 1919-1937* 77
- 3.23 *Gross surplus of arable operations at Crouch Farm, 1920-1939* 78
- 3.24 *Trends of sheep and cattle, England and Wales, 1914-1942* 79

3.25	<i>Number of cattle in Great Britain, 1914-1939</i>	79
3.26	<i>Number of cattle in five counties, 1914-1939</i>	80
3.27	<i>Annual average price of livestock, 1919-1937</i>	80
3.28	<i>Gross surplus of cattle operations at Crouch Farm, 1923-1939</i>	81
3.29	<i>Combined profits of Long Buckby cattle-fattening operations, 1922-1938</i>	82
3.30	<i>Milk price, 1919-1937</i>	83
3.31	<i>Number of sheep in Great Britain, 1914-1939</i>	84
3.32	<i>Sheep numbers in five counties, 1918-1939</i>	84
3.33	<i>Sheep numbers and price index, 1930-1939</i>	85
3.34	<i>Comparison of the MAF sheep price index and the experience at Crouch Farm, 1930-1939</i>	85
3.35	<i>Gross surplus of sheep operations at Crouch Farm, 1923-1939</i>	86
3.36	<i>Farming bankruptcies in England and Wales, 1921-1936</i>	87
3.37	<i>Comparison of agricultural products and wages for Britain, 1920-1929, compared to pre-war</i>	89

Chapter 4

4.1	<i>Image from 1919 about work for ex-servicemen</i>	92
4.2	<i>Index numbers of the retail prices of food and of agricultural products, 1915-1932</i>	98
4.3	<i>Index of wholesale prices of agricultural products and general commodities, 1913-1933 (Average of 1911-1918=100)</i>	99
4.4	<i>Annual average prices of wheat, barley and oats, 1919-1929</i>	100
4.5	<i>Wholesale price indices of corn and crops compared to the Statist index and also the index of fertiliser costs, 1920-1929 – from work by Harkness</i>	100
4.6	<i>Annual average prices of livestock, 1919-1929</i>	101
4.7	<i>Wholesale price indices of livestock compared to the Statist index and also the index of feed costs, 1920-1929 – from work by Harkness</i>	101
4.8	<i>Acreage of arable land in 1875 compared with crops and grass</i>	112
4.9	<i>Acreage of arable land in 1925 compared with crops and grass</i>	113
4.10	<i>Percentage increase in the prices of agricultural produce, and of wholesale commodities with and without food, from January 1920 to September 1923, compared with the average of the years 1911-1913</i>	123
4.11	<i>Deduced national wage rates from Green's work and those derived from the farm records of Crouch Farm</i>	126
4.12	<i>The number and trend of farming bankruptcies in England and Wales, 1900-1936</i>	134
4.13	<i>Number of outbreaks of foot-and-mouth across the country, 1919-1942</i>	142
4.14	<i>Number of outbreaks of foot-and-mouth disease, cattle and sheep, 1919-1940</i>	142
4.15	<i>Average cash return per farm from the Cambridge University Economics Branch study, 1924-1929</i>	152
4.16	<i>Financial details of farming at York Farm, West Hagbourne</i>	154

4.17	<i>Location of Crouch Farm</i>	156
4.18	<i>View of Crouch Farmhouse from the south</i>	157
4.19	<i>Arable acreages per 4 June return at Crouch Farm 1925-1929</i>	158
4.20	<i>Crouch Farm, overview of operations, 1916-1929</i>	159
4.21	<i>Wheat and barley production at Crouch Farm, 1916-1925</i>	160
4.22	<i>Average wheat and barley prices achieved at Crouch Farm, 1916-1925</i>	161
4.23	<i>Number of cattle sold and bought at Crouch Farm, 1916-1929</i>	161
4.24	<i>Average unit selling and buying price of cattle at Crouch Farm, 1916-1929</i>	162
4.25	<i>Number of sheep sold and bought at Crouch Farm, 1916-1929</i>	162
4.26	<i>Average unit selling and buying price of sheep at Crouch Farm, 1916-1929</i>	163
4.27	<i>Annual wage cost at Crouch Farm, 1916-1929</i>	164
4.28	<i>Location of Boughton House in Northamptonshire</i>	167
4.29	<i>Profit/Loss at Home Farm, Boughton House, 1910-1942</i>	169
4.30	<i>Wheat turnover at Home Farm, Boughton, 1918-1941</i>	169
4.31	<i>Turnover of livestock operations at Home Farm, Boughton, 1918-1941</i>	170
4.32	<i>Estimated number of cattle and sheep at Home Farm, Boughton, 1918-1936</i>	170
4.33	<i>Labour costs suggesting increased manpower from 1927 onwards at Home Farm Boughton, 1918-1941</i>	171
4.34	<i>Locations of the three centres of the Cumber farming operations</i>	172
4.35	<i>Cumber capital account, 1916-1930</i>	173
4.36	<i>Cumber profits per profit centre</i>	174
4.37	<i>Cumber, shire horse stock, 1916-1930</i>	174
4.38	<i>Cumber, shire horse and stud operations, 1916-1930</i>	175
4.39	<i>Location map of Clanfield</i>	176
4.40	<i>Farming profits of Willmer family at Friars Court, 1922-1930</i>	177
4.41	<i>Opening and closing stock and livestock sales figures at Friars Court</i>	178
4.42	<i>Map showing the locations of Bridge House farmhouse, and Greenhill farm buildings, Long Buckby</i>	179
4.43	<i>Greenhill Farm before demolition</i>	180
4.44	<i>Bridge House Farm as it is today</i>	180
4.45	<i>Harry Underwood's farming profits from 1915-1938</i>	181
4.46	<i>Map showing the location of the Martin farms in Littleport and Hilgay</i>	182
4.47	<i>Profits from the Martin farms in the Isle of Ely, 1915-1937</i>	183
4.48	<i>Profit at a farm in Long Buckby, 1922-1941</i>	184
4.49	<i>Location of Cotterstock Lodge Farm</i>	185
4.50	<i>Cotterstock Lodge Farm, apparent cash profit, 1921-1939</i>	186
4.51	<i>Surplus at the farms of the Hazell family at Shotesham in Norfolk, 1921-1936</i>	187
4.52	<i>Profits at the farm of the Lewin family at Horningsea in Cambridgeshire, 1921-1934</i>	188

4.53	<i>Profit/Loss at Pitt Hall Farm, Hampshire, 1915-1931</i>	189
4.54	<i>Location of Brampton Ash, east of Market Harborough</i>	190
4.55	<i>Brampton Ash Farm growth in annual deficit, 1920-1931</i>	192
4.56	<i>Value of cattle bought and sold at Brampton Ash, 1920-1928</i>	192
4.57	<i>Value of sheep bought and sold at Brampton Ash, 1920-1928</i>	193
4.58	<i>Value of arable at Brampton Ash, 1920-1928</i>	193
4.59	<i>Brampton Ash and Crouch Farm wages 1920-1924 indexed from a common starting point</i>	194
4.60	<i>Stock and Profit-and-Loss on a farm at Blakesley, 1921-1929</i>	197
4.61	<i>General location of Elton Hall in Northamptonshire</i>	198
4.62	<i>Elton Hall wage bill for farms in-hand, 1919-1928</i>	199
4.63	<i>Profit record of Elton Hall farms in-hand, 1919-1928</i>	200
4.64	<i>Garner tractor, similar to that bought by Elton Hall for £385</i>	201
4.65	<i>Cash change year-on-year, 1924-1932, at Elmfield Farm, Potterspurty</i>	205
4.66	<i>Location of Ampney Crucis and photograph of Ampney Sheephouse Farm</i>	206
4.67	<i>Cash losses at Ampney Sheephouse Farm, 1925-1931</i>	207
4.68	<i>The Lamb family home in Sibford Ferris</i>	208
4.69	<i>The Lamb family Cleveland 'Cletrac' tractor with sons Bernard and Fred</i>	209
4.70	<i>Profit from farming operations of the Lamb family at Sibford Ferris, 1915-1926</i>	210
4.71	<i>Location of Canning Howard's farm at Ilmington, Warwickshire</i>	211
4.72	<i>Canning Howard's farm receipts 1916-1929</i>	211
4.73	<i>Location of Islip Lodge</i>	212
4.74	<i>Islip Lodge turnover and wages, 1920-1926</i>	214
4.75	<i>Approximate location of Groby Park Farm</i>	216
4.76	<i>The increase in the overdraft at Groby Park Farm, 1918-1927</i>	217
4.77	<i>Profits at five farms for the period 1919-1923</i>	218
4.78	<i>Trends of surpluses for ten farms for the period 1919-1923</i>	219
4.79	<i>Surpluses at 12 farms, 1922-1928</i>	220
4.80	<i>Profit comparisons of 2 cattle operations in Long Buckby, 1922-1929</i>	223
4.81	<i>Profit at Manor Farm, Yatesbury, 1922-1928</i>	224
 Chapter 5		
5.1	<i>Sectoral income components of GDP, 1929, 1932 and 1937</i>	234
5.2	<i>Indices (1927-1929=100) of agricultural wages, cost of living and all agricultural products (inclusive of subsidies), 1930-1939</i>	235
5.3	<i>Indices (1927-1929=100) of all agricultural products, and its main components, 1930-1939</i>	236
5.4	<i>Annual average prices of wheat, barley and oats, 1929-1937.</i>	238
5.5	<i>Trends of wheat and barley acreage, England and Wales, 1929-1942</i>	239
5.6	<i>Annual average price of cattle and sheep, 1929-1937</i>	240
5.7	<i>Cattle price index, 1930-1939</i>	240
5.8	<i>Milk price, 1929-1937</i>	241

5.9	<i>Price of milk for manufacturing from March 1935 to December 1940 from a farm in Derbyshire, with polynomial trend line added</i>	242
5.10	<i>Sheep price index 1930-1939</i>	242
5.11	<i>Graph showing variability of profit compared with acreage over a three year period</i>	257
5.12	<i>Average cash return per farm across a range of farm sizes, 1931-1933</i>	258
5.13	<i>Percentage in value terms of products sold off farms in Great Britain, 1925 and 1930-1931</i>	260
5.14	<i>Teddy Wykes' milk float in Spratton in 1935</i>	268
5.15	<i>Teddy Wykes threshing in the 1930s</i>	268
5.16	<i>Crouch Farm, cash surpluses, 1928-1939</i>	279
5.17	<i>Crouch Farm, main crops acreages, 1932-1939</i>	280
5.18	<i>Crouch Farm, number of cattle sold and bought, 1926-1939</i>	280
5.19	<i>Crouch Farm, number of sheep sold and bought, 1926-1939</i>	281
5.20	<i>Crouch Farm, average cattle buying and selling price, 1928-1939</i>	281
5.21	<i>Crouch Farm, average sheep buying and selling price, 1928-1939</i>	282
5.22	<i>Crouch Farm 1931-1939, showing the impact of wheat and cattle subsidies</i>	282
5.23	<i>Crouch Farm, wage rate of 'top' man, 1928-1939</i>	283
5.24	<i>Crouch Farm, annual wage cost, 1928-1939</i>	283
5.25	<i>George Gibbard (extreme right) at the NFU War Cabinet meeting with the Minister of Agriculture</i>	284
5.26	<i>Crouch Farm, analysis of farming surpluses, 1928-1939</i>	285
5.27	<i>Profit at Home Farm, Boughton, 1930-1941</i>	286
5.28	<i>Profit/Loss at Grafton Farm, Boughton Estate, 1932-1941</i>	286
5.29	<i>Net assets of Cumber farms, 1928-1939</i>	288
5.30	<i>Profit centres of Cumber farms, 1928-1934</i>	288
5.31	<i>Stud profit of Cumber operations, 1928-1936</i>	289
5.32	<i>The shire stallions on Cumber's farm in 1936</i>	289
5.33	<i>Opening and closing stock and livestock sales at Friars Court, 1922-1942</i>	291
5.34	<i>Harry Underwood's farming profits, 1928-1938, with trend line added</i>	292
5.35	<i>Charles Underwood's farming profits, 1928-1938, with trend line added</i>	292
5.36	<i>Martin farms in the Isle of Ely, 1928-1937</i>	293
5.37	<i>Anonymous farm in Long Buckby, 1929-1939</i>	294
5.38	<i>Apparent cash profit at Cotterstock Lodge 1921-1939, with trend line added</i>	295
5.39	<i>Location of Hardwick in Buckinghamshire</i>	296
5.40	<i>Profit before drawings at James Todd's farm at Hardwick</i>	296
5.41	<i>Locations of Crouch Farm and Grounds Farm, Adderbury</i>	297
5.42	<i>Cash losses from farming operations at Grounds Farm, Adderbury, 1928-1939</i>	298
5.43	<i>Gross surpluses from farming operations at Grounds Farm, Adderbury, 1928-1939</i>	299

5.44	<i>Location of Radford, Oxfordshire</i>	300
5.45	<i>Comparison of unit buying price of cattle between Radford Farm and Crouch Farm, 1930-1939</i>	301
5.46	<i>Comparison of cash surpluses between Radford Farm and Crouch Farm, 1930-1939</i>	302
5.47	<i>Location and photograph of Pilton Lodge Farm</i>	304
5.48	<i>Pilton Lodge Farm livestock and arable sales, 1931-1939</i>	305
5.49	<i>Pilton Lodge Farm, profit before and after subsidies, 1931-1939</i>	306
5.50	<i>Kingston, turnover of farming operations, 1931-1939</i>	307
5.51	<i>Kingston surplus of farming operations, 1931-1939, with trend line added</i>	308
5.52	<i>Location of Kintbury, Berkshire</i>	308
5.53	<i>Profits at Halfway Farm, Kintbury, Berkshire, 1934-1939</i>	309
5.54	<i>Location of Shilton, Oxfordshire</i>	309
5.55	<i>Profits and corn sales at Manor Farm, Shilton, 1932-1940</i>	310
5.56	<i>Location of Queniborough, near Leicester</i>	311
5.57	<i>Profits at Queniborough dairy farm near Leicester, 1933-1940</i>	312
5.58	<i>Receipts less payments for a farm at Blakesley, 1934-1939</i>	312
5.59	<i>Locations of the parishes of Abbots Ripton and Ramsey</i>	313
5.60	<i>Cash surplus from farm at Ramsey</i>	314
5.61	<i>Surplus on the farms of the Hazell family at Shotesham in Norfolk, 1928-1936</i>	316
5.62	<i>Profit at the farm of the Lewin family at Horningsea in Cambridgeshire, 1927-1934</i>	316
5.63	<i>Location of Berkswell Hall Home Farm</i>	320
5.64	<i>Berkswell Hall Home Farm turnover and profit 1929-1939</i>	321
5.65	<i>Elton Hall acreage of farms in-hand 1931-1941</i>	322
5.66	<i>Gross output of agricultural holdings, including subsidies, 1927-1939</i>	324
5.67	<i>Surpluses at 11 farms, 1928-1931</i>	326
5.68	<i>Trend of surpluses at 11 farms, 1928-1931</i>	326
5.69	<i>Chilton Park Farm in 2014</i>	328
5.70	<i>Comparison of profits at Pilton Lodge, Crouch Farm, and the farming operations of T. J. Kingston, 1931-1939</i>	329
5.71	<i>Surpluses at 11 farms, 1931-1938</i>	330
5.72	<i>Comparison of two cattle-fattening operation in Long Buckby, 1926-1939</i>	331
5.73	<i>Comparison of profits at two dairy farms, 1929-1939</i>	332

Chapter 6

6.1	<i>Profit comparisons at Boughton Home Farm and Crouch Farm, 1911-1942</i>	346
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List of Tables

Chapter 1

1.1	<i>Source material studied and case-studies resulting</i>	24
1.2	<i>List of farms studied</i>	31

Chapter 2

2.1	<i>Largest landowners in Northamptonshire in 1872 and 2012</i>	36
2.2	<i>Imports of farm products, 1854-1896</i>	38
2.3	<i>Farming bankruptcies, 1892-1918</i>	48
2.4	<i>Farm produce price indices, 1914-1919</i>	53

Chapter 3

3.1	<i>Farming output comparisons between Britain and Western Europe</i>	73
3.2	<i>Indices of wholesale and agricultural prices in five countries, 1926-1929</i>	88

Chapter 4

4.1	<i>Variation in crop areas and livestock in England and Wales, 1919 compared with 1918</i>	111
4.2	<i>Estimated food production of cereals and potatoes in England and Wales, as indicated by official statistics (thousands of tons)</i>	111
4.3	<i>Agricultural output and share of farm income, 1920-1939</i>	133
4.4	<i>Losses at James Ismay's farm at Iwerne Minster, 1921-1923</i>	153
4.5	<i>Estimation of the farm size of Brampton Ash</i>	191
4.6	<i>Changes in categories of farming income at Elton Hall, 1920-1921</i>	201
4.7	<i>A selection of Elton Hall rents comparing 1922 and 1927 with pre-war levels</i>	202
4.8	<i>Islip Lodge farming details, 1920-1926</i>	213
4.9	<i>Key profit changes in the mid 1920s</i>	222
4.10	<i>Number of farms in 1928 Cambridge University survey, and percentage seeking rent reduction or serving notices to quit</i>	226

Chapter 5

5.1	<i>Change in economic indicators 1929-1932</i>	232
5.2	<i>Kingston farming operation, estimate of livestock acreage</i>	307
5.3	<i>Profit trends in the 1930s</i>	333

Abbreviations

c.	<i>circa</i>
CL	<i>Country Life</i>
CPRE	Campaign to Protect Rural England
cwt	Hundredweight
d	Pence (pre-decimal currency)
DOA	Department of Agriculture
DRO	Derbyshire Record Office
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GRO	Gloucestershire Record Office
HA	Huntingdon Archives
HC	House of Commons
HL	House of Lords
HMSO	Her (His) Majesty's Stationery Office
lb	Pound (<i>avoirdupois</i> weight)
m	Million
mm	Millimetre
MAF	Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries
MAFF	Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food
MERL	Museum of English Rural Life
NA	National Archives
NFU	National Farmers' Union
NRO	Northamptonshire Record Office
<i>p.a.</i>	<i>per annum</i>
Pers. comm.	Personal communication
RO	Record Office
ROLLR	Record Office for Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland
s	Shilling (pre-decimal currency)
SRO	Staffordshire Record Office
TNA	The National Archives
WRO	Warwickshire Record Office

Chapter 1

Introduction, definition of the study area, methodology and gazetteer of farms studied

Introduction

The task set by this thesis was to find evidence of how individual farmers fared during the interwar period. Apart from a very extensive University of Cambridge sponsored contemporary survey, limited to just three years from 1931-1933, almost no evidence from individual farms has ever been examined and published. The main body of analysis which does exist is restricted to overall conclusions for the whole farming sector, and trends within the main branches of farming.

From inception, the task was described to the author as a hopeless one due to there being insufficient records on which to base such any study.¹ However an early contact produced a complete set of farming financial diaries from 1910 to the early 2000s. This encouraging find, which has so far proved unique, led on to 35 worthwhile records being sourced, 17 of which were and remain held privately. Although these are in very different forms with most not covering the whole of the interwar period, analysis shows common trends and provides insight into the ups and downs of individual farming operations and specialisations.

This chapter will first take an overview some of the contemporary and later research into this period. Then it will look at the background to the task of this research to find original

¹ Pers. comm. David Hall, author of *The Open Fields of Northamptonshire* (Northampton, 1995).

financial records kept by farmers in the 1919-1939 period. This will be referred to as the ‘interwar’ period, although strictly it should be called the post-war era.² The approach of using individual farming records differentiates this thesis from most other analytical work. The latter can only provide a picture of the average farmer, usually analysed by county, without differentiating the particular characteristics of each farm. This does not get to the heart of what this task sought to address, which was how individual farmers fared, and why some survived and others did not. The approach taken involves no statistical assumptions, and the figures are generally presented as they are and without further assumptions. If similar trends were to be found among the few available sets of farming accounts, conclusions could be drawn as to how individual farmers faced up to the challenges of the interwar years.

University of Cambridge research

Book-keeping is not a strong point among farmers, and it is only on farms of more than 500 acres that it is commonly practised. It appears that accounts are kept primarily for income tax purposes, and that their potentialities as a guide to management are seldom appreciated.³

Research by the University was carried out by its Farm Economics Branch in the Department of Agriculture. While it is not known when this branch was formed, its first report appeared in 1924 and covered the period 1923-1924. It was the first in a series of

² Professor David Reynolds on BBC Two, 24 September 2014, *Long Shadow* [Documentary]. The 1914-1918 conflict will be referred to throughout as the ‘Great War’, rather than the tag that was substituted in 1948 of ‘World War One’.

³ DOA University of Cambridge, *An Economic Survey of Agriculture in the Eastern Counties of England, 1932 (Report No. 21)* (Cambridge, 1933), pp. 79-80. In fact at that time, it was not a requirement for tax purposes. This came in the early 1940s.

nine reports into the economic and financial state of a relatively small number of farms in the eastern counties.⁴ The number of farms, not identified by name, in each report varied between six and sixteen, and the farms studied one year were, with some exceptions, usually not the next or later years. The farms averaged *c.* 300 acres, and were generally arable to a 70-80 percent extent. With different farms being chosen for each of the studies, there was no continuity of source material which would allow any significance to be read into the resulting financial trends, as shown later in Figure 4.15 on page 152.⁵

This series of investigations ceased after Report 17 which covered the year 1928-1929. In 1931, new research commenced, almost certainly the most ambitious project of its type ever undertaken. It involved the collection and analysis of data from around 1000 farms (between 983 farms in 1931 and 1085 farms in 1933) from the six counties of Norfolk, Suffolk, Essex, Hertfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Huntingdonshire. This required 16 researchers to make around 3500 farm visits during the course of each year, covering 80,000 miles annually.⁶ Data were collected by visiting and interrogating each farmer personally, and did not rely on farmers keeping records as only 17 percent of those involved in the project did so.⁷ Analysis of the 1931-1933 research is shown in Chapter 5, pages 256-259, but a general comment about this work can be made at this stage.

⁴ These reports by DOA, University of Cambridge are all titled *An Economic and Financial Analysis of [number of farms] Eastern Counties Farms in [year date or dates]*. Report 1 was written by John Archibald Venn, Reports 2-6 by J. Venn *et al*, Reports 8, 10 and 12 by R. Carslaw *et al*, and Report 17 by W. Kirkpatrick *et al*. John Venn may have headed up the Farm Economics branch; later he was President of Queens' College, Cambridge, from 1932 until his death and Vice-Chancellor of Cambridge University, 1941-1943.

⁵ DOA, University of Cambridge, *An Economic and Financial Analysis*, various dates.

⁶ DOA, University of Cambridge, *An Economic Survey of Agriculture in the Eastern Counties of England*, Reports 19, 21 and 22 published in 1932, 1933 and 1934.

⁷ DOA, University of Cambridge, *An Economic Survey*, p. 80.

These surveys could have been of enormous value to the current thesis had there been continuity in terms of farms surveyed in the 1924-1929 reports, and also had the period of the 1931-1933 study been longer. In each of the latter reports, there was a written analysis of some ten profitable farms; and in the 1933 report of four unprofitable ones, examining how these could have become more profitable. This suggests that the purpose of this most comprehensive survey had been the education of students in the improvement of farming methods. As such, this was very much in the contemporary thrust for better and more informed farming.

Governmental Farm Management Survey

This commenced with the harvest year ending 30 September 1937.⁸ Like so much of government thinking on agriculture this idea, first mooted in 1928, was subject to almost endless procrastination mainly on the grounds of cost. These early overtures withered, but the matter re-surfaced in 1935. Even then, there was much opposition, and disagreement as to what comprised income and profit. This absence of any official information on farm profitability merely underscores the information vacuum in which this study has been undertaken. The Farm Management Survey statistics come too late to be of any meaningful help to this study.⁹ Martin has made the point that these were unrepresentative as they only included individuals who had volunteered to take part and to keep records.¹⁰ He also pointed out that farmers were not required to keep records for

⁸ P. Brassley *et al*, 'Accounting for agriculture: The origins of the Farm Management Survey', *Agricultural History Review*, 61 (2013), pp. 135-153.

⁹ These records are held at MERL, SR FMS D/1/70 *et seq*.

¹⁰ J. Martin, *The Development of Modern Agriculture: British Farming since 1931* (Basingstoke, 2000), pp. 19-20. Farm Management Survey records <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/a2a/records.aspx?cat=007-srfms&cid=0#0> [accessed 31 December 2012].

tax purposes, so it was mainly the larger and more progressive farms that kept such records – and a few small farmers as this thesis will show.

Contemporary and subsequent analysis

The existing historiography leaves no doubt that the interwar period, especially after 1921, was a very difficult period for agriculture, as well as a time of much social upheaval and financial strains. This is dealt with in Chapters 3, 4 and 5, but this is reviewed here together with its shortcomings.

Government 4 June surveys had been in existence since 1866.¹¹ Based to some extent on these, much of the earlier examination of agriculture had been confined to Royal Commissions, which concerned themselves more with areas under cultivation, prices and general commentary in order to suggest policy making. It took the new breed of academics such as C. S. Orwin, director of the Agricultural Economics Research Institute at Oxford formed in 1913 and supported by the then Board of Agriculture, to start the more analytical processes.¹² This then led to a movement in that direction in farming journals, such as the *Journal of the Royal Agricultural Society of England* and the *Journal of the Farmers' Club*. The relevant historiography for the study period divides into those studies written at the time and often urging a certain course of action to those written via a retrospective and analytical approach based on whatever evidence was available. The general literature comprises backgrounds of the political situation and

¹¹ Defra website

<http://archive.defra.gov.uk/evidence/statistics/foodfarm/landuselivestock/junesurvey/documents/JuneMethod.pdf> [accessed 31 December 2012].

¹² <http://www.oua.ox.ac.uk/holdings/Agricultural%20Economics%20AE.pdf> [accessed 31 December 2012]. The Board of Agriculture was established in 1889, and then from 1903 the Board of Agriculture and Fisheries, and from 1919 the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries.

policies, society, unionisation and the labour market, with some of these venturing into assessments of the overall position of agriculture.

Papers at the Farmers' Club around 1919-1920, such as those given by V. Malcolmson and Sir H. Trustram Eve, were much more concerned with the issues of government subsidies and control.¹³ Perhaps it was the setting up of academic establishments such as Orwin's Oxford Institute and the Farm Economics branch of the Department of Agriculture at Cambridge, and the government's encouragement of new technology in farming that eventually spawned a series of papers.¹⁴ W. Dampier-Whetham was an active speaker at the Farmers' Club, although his two papers of 1928 and 1931 are not particularly analytical.¹⁵ Leaving aside the Iwerne Minster example, based on actual empirical data and referred to later on pages 152-153, the first in-depth analysis seems to have been authored by R. Thompson, president of the Agricultural Economics Society in 1929, followed by an article by his successor Dampier-Whetham in 1930, and a conference paper by D. Harkness in 1934.¹⁶ Other prolific campaigners or writers were

¹³ V. Malcolmson, 'The economic future of agriculture', *Journal of the Farmers' Club* (London, 1919), pp. 39-57. T. Eve, 'State control and agriculture', *Journal of the Farmers' Club* (London, 1919), pp. 113-136. Sir Henry Trustram Eve 'needed no introduction' when he spoke at the Farmers' Club in 1919, and was president of the Rating Surveyors' Association at the time.

¹⁴ Reports of the Farm Economics Branch at Cambridge are held at the Cambridge University Library, the first report is dated 1925. C S Orwin was director of the Agricultural Economics Research Institute at Oxford, formed in 1913.

¹⁵ W. Dampier-Whetham, 'The effects of monetary instability upon agriculture', *Journal of the Farmers' Club* (London, 1928), pp. 21-29. W. Dampier-Whetham, 'Agricultural and financial policy', *Journal of the Farmers' Club* (London, 1931), pp. 81-101. Dampier-Whetham served as the first secretary of the Agricultural Research Council from 1931-1935.

¹⁶ R. Thompson, 'Some indications of the nature and extent of the present agricultural depression', *Journal of Agricultural Economics*, 1. 2 (1929), pp. 38-51. W. Dampier-Whetham, 'The economics of rural landowning', *Journal of Agricultural Economics*, 1. 3 (1930), pp. 56-75. D. Harkness, 'The distribution of agricultural income', *Journal of Agricultural Economics*, 3. 1 (1934), pp. 25-39.

G. Fussell, Sir R. Stapledon and C. Turnor.¹⁷ Alongside these are the more fictional writings of authors such as A. G. Street, A. Bell, H. Barrett, and C. Turnor, who share their own experiences from a strong factual background.

A report which was carried out in 1929 under the auspices of the Agricultural Economic Research Institute at Oxford and which sought to measure the health of agriculture at the time, was referred to in *Country Life* in 1930.¹⁸ Presumably because of the absence of suitable accounts, the research had relied instead on farm rents as well as market demand for farms. It concluded that ‘although our national agriculture cannot be considered prosperous, yet at the same time to affirm its general depression is both unwise and untrue’. The leader writer at *Country Life* did not agree with Skilbeck, and felt that the report had not got to the heart of the matter, a conclusion with which this thesis will concur.

More recent qualitative analytical work includes that by writers such as J. Brown, A. Cooper, P. Dewey, R. Graves, A. Howkins, C. Mowat, R. Perren and L. Seaman. One of the key sources used by this thesis was *Country Life*, whose columns tell the story of agriculture on an almost weekly basis throughout the study period. More empirical analysis has been undertaken through the *Journal of Agricultural Economics*, *Economic History Review*, *The Agrarian History of England and Wales*, and others by researchers

¹⁷ G. Fussell joined MAF in 1909, and served there for 40 years and was a prolific writer such that a separate publication lists his more than 500 articles and books, see G. Fussell, *A Bibliography of his Writings on Agricultural History* (Reading, 1967). George Stapledon was involved in the science of grasslands. Christopher Turnor, an ardent campaigner for agricultural reform, was also close to Bledisloe.

¹⁸ *CL*, LXVII, 1728 (1 March 1930), p. 302. This quotes D. Skilbeck *et al*, *The Incidence of Farming Depression – a Survey of Conditions in England To-day* (Oxford, 1929).

such as J. Bellerby, P. Brassley, E. J. T. Collins, C. Feinstein, B. Mitchell and P. Deane, E. Ojala and E. Whetham.

The approach taken by Brassley, based on work by E. Ojala, appeared to be of particular relevance to this thesis.¹⁹ Brassley's studies were inconclusive stating that further work was needed. Much of his paper is devoted to an analysis of Ojala's work reporting that this had concluded that 'output fell between the wars, that costs fell too, but not by as much, and so farm incomes fell'.²⁰ Brassley criticised this work because it took 'no notice of the changing value of money and the separation of Eire in 1922'. His own work set out to derive 'net farm income', which he showed had fallen very steeply after 1922, then stayed flat, until rising in the period 1935-1939.²¹

Ojala and Brassley's work shows the shortcomings of working with statistics. The results can be open to interpretation depending on the assumptions made; they are very general in nature; and are overall rather than farm specific. They also aggregated unequal periods of years with the result that graphical representation cannot be made. By its very nature, this approach cannot hope to identify why some farmers survived and others not. Neither can this identify the stresses that farmers faced, for example when savage deflation hit in 1921 with wages holding up for a year or more, nor the effect of the long period of depression in whittling away farmers' capital.

¹⁹ Pers. comm. Paul Brassley, (31 December 2012). P. Brassley, *Agricultural Output, Costs and Incomes in the United Kingdom 1919-40* (Unpublished draft paper, 2003). P. Brassley, 'Output and technical change in twentieth-century British agriculture', *Agricultural History Review*, 48 (2000), pp. 60-84. E. Ojala, *Agriculture and Economic Progress* (Oxford, 1952), *passim*.

²⁰ Ojala, *Agriculture*, *passim*.

²¹ As the periods he used were aggregated and unequal, they cannot be shown graphically. P. Brassley, 'British farming between the wars' in P. Brassley *et al*, *The English Countryside between the Wars. Regeneration or Decline?* (Woodbridge, 2006), pp. 192-199.

Harkness constructed an index, for the period 1925-1931, of net farming output in terms of stable currency, but the conclusions are far too general and the period too short.²² His conclusions in 1934 line up with later commentators such as Howkins and Brassley that the interwar farming period was not universally bad. This is in contrast to the views of Street, Addison and Barrett, as will be seen later. Generally, the existing historiography does not present a clear picture of the fortunes of agriculture as the 1930s progressed. Any suggestion that these improved soon after the passing of the 1932 Wheat Act is challenged by this thesis, which sought to resolve this issue. The foregoing show the difficulty of reaching informed and detailed conclusions about the state of agriculture in anything other than the most general manner.

Farmers and record-keeping

Accounts? I don't keep no accounts: my bank book shows me well enough how I'm doing.²³

Farmers, by their very nature, are out in the fields dealing with the land and their animals, and up against the elements. There was little time or reason for a farmer to record his daily actions, let alone the payments and receipts of his trade. Even when specifically asked, as was the case in the eastern counties in respect of research by the University of Cambridge between 1923 and 1933, only a small percentage were found to keep accounts.²⁴ For as novelist A. G. Street put it

²² Harkness, 'The distribution of agricultural income', p. 29.

²³ A. Bell, *Silver Ley* (1931, London, 1940), p. 119.

²⁴ Report 21 shows 17 percent, of which most were from the larger farms.

One didn't consider whether the crop one was sowing would pay a profit over the cost of production or not. That never entered anyone's head. In good seasons farmers did pretty well, and in bad ones, presumably not quite so well. Granted, there were occasional instances of farmers going bankrupt, but these rare cases could always be definitely traced to drink, gambling, or some other vice or extravagance causing neglect of the farm by the master. If one attended to one's business decently, one got along all right. Some did better than others, but all got along all right.²⁵

The keeping of records was an unloved subject as was referred to in response to a talk given by Orwin at the Farmers' Club in 1913.²⁶ However, encouragement to keep records was by no means a new topic. Quoting recent sources, R. Bryer found that as far back as the period 1750-1850 'there are exhortations for better and more accurate accounting procedures for every aspect of business, including farming' and that from the early nineteenth century 'authors produced printed account books for farmers'.²⁷ He referred *inter alia* to a competition in 1883 held by the Royal Agricultural Society for the best article on accounts, also referred to in responses to Orwin's paper given to the Farmers' Club, referred to above.

²⁵ A. Street, *Farmer's Glory* (London, 1932), p. 25.

²⁶ C. Orwin, 'Farm accounts', *Journal of the Farmers' Club* (March 1913), pp. 45-65. Mr Dickson of Sywell Hall in Northamptonshire pointed out that the journal had previously advocated farmers keeping accounts as far back as 1858.

²⁷ R. Bryer, 'The genesis of the capitalist farmer: towards a Marxist accounting history of the origins of the English agricultural revolution', Thesis (Warwick Business School, December 2003), in particular pp. 22-23.

A further consideration was the tax treatment of farming. During the study period, Schedule A covered tax on income, including rent from the letting of land, while tax on commercial occupation of land was levied under Schedule B. The latter was based on the net annual value or rental value of the holding, where the rental value was taken exclusive of the value of the farmhouse in the case of an owner-occupier, but inclusive of that value in the case of a tenant-farmer. Despite aspirations from politicians as far back as 1881 that ‘farmers should be treated like all other traders and should be required to keep books...’, the tax did not become based on the output of the farm until the early 1940s, thus there was no need for the farmer to keep any records for such purposes.²⁸ The study area is next defined, followed by a statement of the methodology. The chapter concludes with a gazetteer of farms studied.

²⁸ J. Martin, *The Development of Modern Agriculture*, p. 20. B. Sabine, *A History of Income Tax* (London, 1966), pp. 118, 152, 165. In the nineteenth century, Schedule B had been assessed at half the rental value; it was doubled in 1915; and later on in the war it was increased to twice the rental value; but it was decreased back to the rental value by legislation in 1922 and, at the same time, there was a revaluation for Schedule A (tax on income from land) purposes effective tax year 1924-1925

Definition of the study area

The initial approach had been to concentrate on Northamptonshire alone, but it soon became apparent that this would provide insufficient individual studies of farming operations. The study area was, therefore, broadened to the area of traditional mixed farming defined by the many and varied descriptions of the Midland Plain or Midland Clays.²⁹ Massingham described the Midland Clays in an emotive contemporary publication:

It is the country of the Oxfordshire blue clay, impervious to springs, a slime in winter, hard as the heart of Goneril in summer and an emblem of that Power of Inertia in summer which shatters the eager, mounting spirit of those that wish better of the world than in degradation and tribulation it is. In dense beds beneath unresilient grassland stretches the clay of the great plain whose blue is as different from the blue of the sky as the earth is as remote from it.³⁰

Hartley's description of the 'so-called Midland Plain' is of an area similar to that in Figure 1.1.³¹

²⁹ T. Williamson *et al*, *Property and Landscape: A Social History of Landownership and the English Countryside*, (Frome, 1987), p. 16. T. Williamson, *The Transformation of Rural England: Farming and the Landscape 1700-1870* (Exeter, 2002), p. 11, where it was acknowledged to O. Rackham, *The History of the Countryside* (London, 1986), pp. 3-5. Geological maps from the British Geological Society. MAF, *The Agricultural Output of England and Wales 1925* (HMSO, 1927). Viscount Astor *et al*, *British Agriculture* (London, 1938), p. 61. Royal Geographical Society, 'Review of *An Agricultural Atlas of England and Wales* by J. Pryse Howell', *The Geographical Journal*, 68. 4 (1926), pp. 343-345. M. Messer for the University of Oxford Agricultural Economics Research Institute, *An Agricultural Atlas of England & Wales* (MAF, 2nd ed., 1932), *passim*. J. Davies, *Grass Farming in the Welland Valley: a Study made on behalf of the Agricultural Economics Research Institute of Oxford* (Oxford, 1928), pp. 62-63. L. Stamp (ed.), *The Land of Britain: The Report of The Land Utilisation Survey of Britain* (1948, London, 1962), pp. 3-25. G. Stapledon *et al*, *Ley Farming* (London, 1941), pp. xiv, 11-21 and map at the end of the book. W. Davies. 'The Grassland map of England and Wales: explanatory notes', *Agriculture: The Journal of the Ministry of Agriculture* (HMSO, 1941), pp. 48, 112-121 (Digital copy of the map acknowledged to the Stapledon Memorial Trust). S. Williams, *Farming in the Midlands* (London, 1967), pp. 7-16.

³⁰ H. Massingham, *Country* (England, 1934), p. 1.

³¹ D. Hartley, *The Countryman's England* (1980, London, 1935), pp. 31-32.

Figure 1.1: The Midland Plan or Midland Clays area



With results across the country available from the Museum of English Rural Life, the scope of this research was ultimately widened to the gathering of original financial farming records over an area based around, but not limited to, the area defined in Figure 1.1. The result is an extremely comprehensive study of financial farming records from the interwar period over a significant swathe of England.

Methodology

Two principal approaches were taken. The first was to source accounts from Record Offices including the Museum of English Rural Life, the second to find records in private hands. In a few cases, Record Offices had their genesis between the wars, but in many cases they were not set up until the second half of the twentieth century.³² The digitised records of MERL and eleven Record Offices were searched using a variety of key words.³³ This resulted in source material being examined with resulting case-studies as shown in Table 1.1.

Table 1.1: *Source material studied and case-studies resulting*

Record Office	Sources	Case-studies
Buckinghamshire	9	1
Derbyshire	4	0
Gloucestershire	6	1
Huntingdonshire	1	1
Leicestershire	7	2
Museum of English Rural Life	21	9

³² P. Bell *et al*, 'George Herbert Fowler and county records', *Journal of the Society of Archivists*, 23. 2 (2002), pp. 249-264. Bedfordshire Record Office was established in 1913. In Northamptonshire a Record Society was established in 1920, and its record rooms were opened at County Hall in 1930; and this can be regarded as the genesis of this Record Office. Generally, though, Record Offices were established after the Second World War.

³³ Key words used varied between record Offices but included 'farming', 'farm records', 'farm accounts', 'agriculture'.

Northamptonshire	6	1
Norfolk (farm in Northamptonshire ³⁴)	1	1
Oxfordshire	6	0
Staffordshire	3	0
Warwickshire	9	2
Worcestershire	0	0
TOTAL	73	18

Other than Worcestershire, all were visited and their card index records examined as well as their digitised records. There is an issue with some of the Record Offices with more recent deposits having not been catalogued, and in some cases, it seems unlikely that these will be catalogued in the foreseeable future. Unless a researcher knows of a specific deposit, there is no way of finding out whether these un-catalogued deposits might hold individual farm records.³⁵ Generally Record Offices appear to hold more material listed as ‘farm accounts’ from the nineteenth century and earlier, than they do from the early twentieth century. One such example, from Derbyshire, is shown in the footnote.³⁶ Where found, records varied in value, ranging from a two-year span (of almost no value) to 14 years in one case, but with most covering five to seven years. Sometimes the location of the farm was missing, or two or more farms were mentioned but with no clarity as to which was which. An example of this is the Hall and Penn diaries, with W. J.

³⁴ Norfolk RO was also visited because of one record in Northamptonshire. Norfolk is not within the study area but its digitised records show only one hopeful record. Brampton Ash was found on the website of the Norfolk RO with the help of one of the author’s primary contacts, Rosemary Eady of Northamptonshire Record Society, pers. comm. (various dates).

³⁵ This was demonstrated in respect of a deposit, known to have been made, pers. comm., ROLLR e-mail, 30.1.2014. ‘I have checked our accessions database and these records (deposited 2003) are unfortunately part of our ever-increasing cataloguing backlog.’ It was also admitted over the telephone that deposits back to the 1980s were still not catalogued.

³⁶ DRO, D6832/1, records farm accounts on the Abney Grange Estate 1887-1900. Thereafter the book records only wages. There is a comment with the 1899-1900 accounts about having to sell the sheep and lambs due to the great heat and want of rain in ‘this the last year’. It is unclear whether this farming operation stopped or it was decided to stop keeping accounts.

Penn moving from Wootton to Maidwell in 1919, and Owen Hall appearing to sell his entire live and dead stock in 1931.³⁷

The second approach was to find farmers who might still retain un-deposited accounts from the period. At the start of this study Lampport Hall in Northamptonshire, one of the primary contacts, led to the diaries of Crouch Farm in Oxfordshire, probably one of the most complete set of farming records in existence today.³⁸ To find others, there were some obvious difficulties. It would require these farmers to be third or fourth generation families going back to this period, and who had survived the very difficult period of the 1920s and 1930s (when many walked away from their tenancies). Farmers would also have had to keep accounts and stored these in conditions such that they would not have either deteriorated or been eaten by mice. In seeking out these records, much false memory was encountered with, for example, one farmer having a friend ‘whose family farmed that period’ only to find that they did not start farming until after the Second World War. Likewise, records promised did not then appear or, if they did, were a shadow of what was promised. In the author’s home county of Northamptonshire, primary contacts made this task easier, using these first and then following recommendations from farmer to farmer. This was not without its problems as farmers spend their lives outside farming and have little time to go searching their attics. They

³⁷ NRO, Hall & Penn farming diaries. From discussion with several farming families, there was considerable mobility of farmers moving from one farm to another in this period, so it was not necessarily a sign of distress.

³⁸ These cover the entire study period (and both before and after, right up to the early 2000s), and came in the form of Boots Scribbling Dairies, one for each year, with daily entries of cash paid out and received with details of such monies. This included number of livestock bought and sold; quarters of corn sold; wages paid and number of men. For each year a spreadsheet was created: all the detail entered from the individual diary; and then totalled, a process taking some 4-6 hours for each year. The analysis became more complex after 1933 when wheat and cattle subsidy payments were received.

were generally unapproachable during March to October, and this restricted the contact period to the winter months. About one hundred farmers were contacted with the great majority having no records at all but this resulted in seven sets of accounts from Northamptonshire. An approach was also made to some of the larger landed estates, but most of these did not farm in-hand in the study period, although two exceptions to this were found at Boughton House and Elton Hall, both in Northamptonshire.

As primary contacts were not available to the author outside his home county, it was not possible to replicate the primary contact methodology elsewhere, so it was necessary to take a number of other approaches. The first of these was to have an article published in *Farmers' Weekly* in November 2012, this resulting in five responses none of which offered accounts but with one, the Stafford family, providing anecdotal material used in Chapter 4, pages 129-132. The next approach was made through the four closest NFU regions. In November 2013, they were requested to place a notice in their newsletters, these yielding only one useful contact in Derbyshire.³⁹ A third and more productive approach was to Local History Societies in three of the counties. In Northamptonshire, 26 members of the Northamptonshire Association of Local History Societies were approached by post, and yielded one useful record. Oxfordshire had a similar umbrella organisation, and 57 societies were contacted, with about a third of these responding positively resulting in three new studies of individual farms. In Leicestershire, the listing came from 'localhistoryonline', and 24 societies were contacted.⁴⁰ In Northamptonshire only, the local Women's Institute was contacted and they placed an article in their county

³⁹ Hollies Farm, Yeldersley, Derbyshire referred to in Chapter 5, pages 241-242. While it did not produce any accounts as such, it provided an excellent record of actual milk prices achieved from 1935-1940.

⁴⁰ <http://www.local-history.co.uk/Groups/> [accessed at different dates].

magazine, and an article was placed in *Hindsight*, the journal of the Northamptonshire Association for Local History, but neither yielded positive results. Finally, material or local histories deposited at Record Offices have suggested possible sources, one such resulting in the records for York Farm at West Hagbourne, Oxfordshire, pages 154-155.

Mention should be made of approaches that were not found to be helpful. Following an e-mail thread through the Interwar Rural History forum, two suggested approaches were considered but rejected. The first was to use the *London Gazette* archive to search for bankruptcies.⁴¹ Of itself, this had not been considered as a primary approach because evidence of bankruptcy, if found, would not detail the lead-up to this. It was also most unlikely that it would help identify the existing family members. TNA at Kew holds a mere 1746 files with the keyword 'bankruptcy' from 1832 to 2000 and another researcher has advised that very few records are accessible from other sources.⁴² A further possibility was to use sale announcements but, from the outset, this had been considered unreliable as it would only produce circumstantial evidence. The Interwar Rural History forum e-mail exchange provided a good example of the latter. A farm sale poster from 1931 is in the possession of the Museum of English Rural Life at Reading.⁴³ The Keeper of the Museum had published a hypothetical write up on this suggesting that this was a distressed sale by the farmer concerned, possibly on retirement. Internet research quickly

⁴¹ <https://www.thegazette.co.uk/all-notices> [accessed November 2013]. The search process used multiple words but was unhelpful as this merely identified pages on which the several words appeared, not necessarily in the same clip from the London Gazette. So, for instance, a search of the three words farmer, bankrupt and Northamptonshire produced only seven entries and no clip was found with all three search terms.

⁴² <http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/C2761> [accessed 10 November 2013]. Pers. comm. Prof. Richard Hoyle, University of Reading, (17 November 2013).

⁴³ Sale on 1 April 1931 of livestock at Manor Farm, Redbourne, Lincolnshire by order of E. Owen Ayre.

identified the current owner of the farm, and this turned out to be the same family, who had actually taken over the farm in 1931 and were selling livestock surplus to their requirements, and embarking on farming this holding. This example underscores the danger of making assumptions from such material, something that has been avoided by this thesis.

Gazetteer of farms studied

Thirty-five farming operations, shown in Table 1.2, pages 31-33, were studied from eleven counties with records sourced from Record Offices, nine from county offices, nine from MERL, and 17 from private hands. Acreages were known or estimated for 30 farms, and totalled nearly 13,000 acres, so the total farms studied probably covered c. 15,000 acres. Fifteen farms were owned, nine were tenanted, one tenancy was bought during the period, and there were eleven farms where this information was not known. There was a mix of uses as shown in the table. Farms are listed in the order in which they appear in Chapter 4 or in Chapter 5, if their study periods are later. The location of all the farms are shown in Figure 1.2 on page 30. This map includes the features from Williamson's map, the red line indicating the extent of his Midlands Pasture District, with the blue shaded area being his South East Midlands Arable District.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Williamson, *Transformation of Rural England*, pp. 29 *et seq.* Pers. comm. with Prof. Tom Williamson, University of East Anglia, confirmed the exclusion of the south-east part of Northamptonshire from the pasture area, being part of the arable district instead. The assistance of Jake Sales of Maps4Planners is acknowledged in the preparation of this map.

Figure 1.2: Map showing the location of the 35 farms in the study area

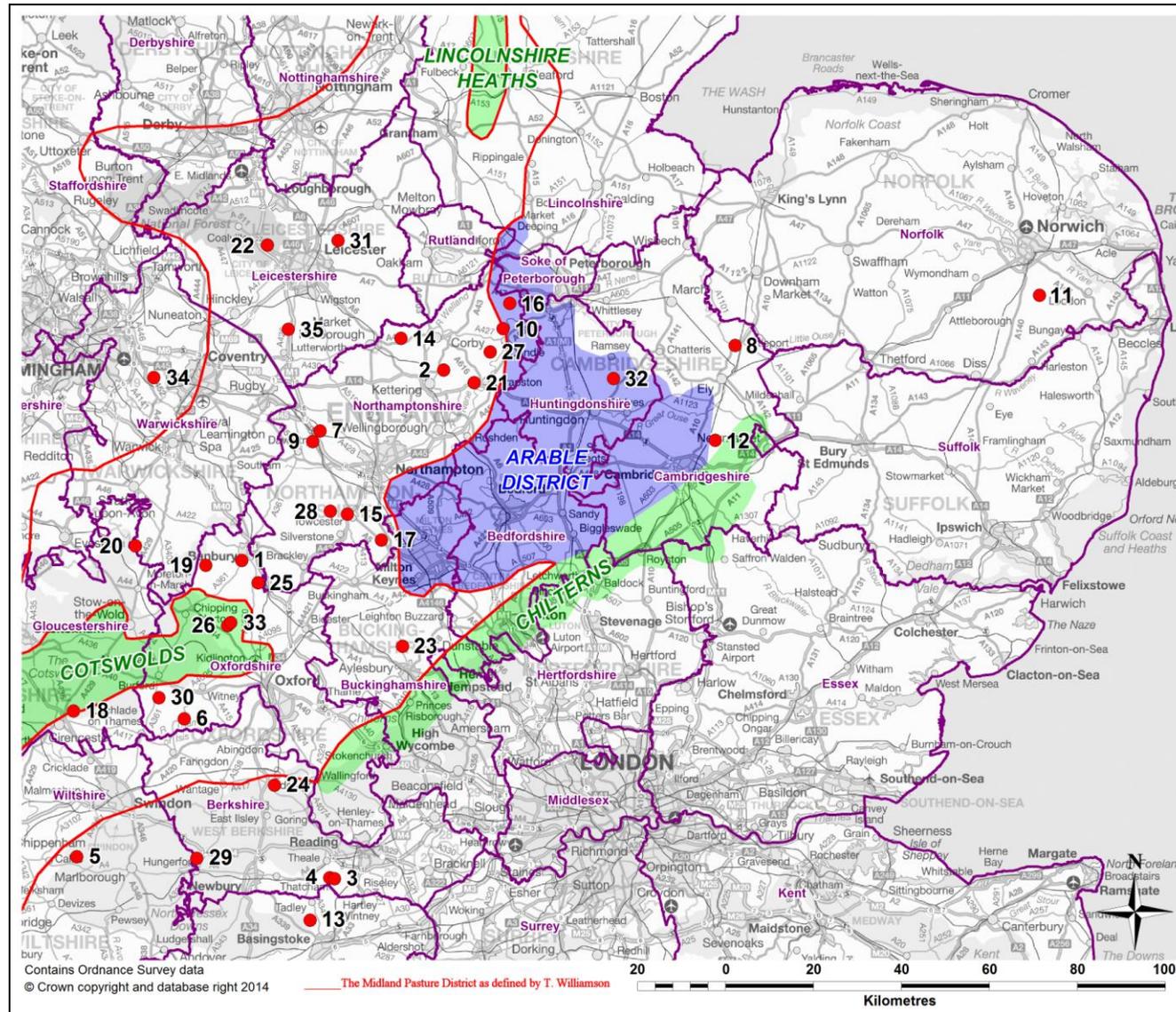


Table 1.2: *List of farms studied*

No.	Name	County	Source	Period	Acreage	Own/tenant	Type
1	Crouch Farm	Oxon	Private	All	163	Tenant	Mixed
2	Boughton House	Northants	Private	All	547	Owned	Mixed
3	Cumber, Theale & Beansheaf	Berkshire	Private	All	350	Tenant	Livestock
4	Cumber, Bradfield	Berkshire	Private	All	600	Tenant	Livestock
5	Cumber, Manor Farm Yatesbury	Wiltshire	Private	All	800	Tenant	Shire Horse stud included
6	Friars Court	Oxon	Private	From 1922	212	Bought 1920	Cattle and dairy
7	Underwood family	Northants	Private	To 1938	530	Tenant	Cattle fattening
8	Martin family	Cambs	MERL	To 1936/7	200	Not known	Mixed
9	Long Buckby (anonymous)	Northants	Private	From 1922	Not known	Not known	Cattle fattening
10	Cotterstock Lodge	Northants	Private	From 1921	343	Tenant, bt. 1927	Mixed
11	Hazell family	Norfolk	MERL	1921-1936	Not known	Bought 1921	Mixed
12	Lewin family	Cambs	MERL	1921-1935	Estimated 500	Tenant	Mixed, substantial dairy from 1927

13	Pitt Hall Estate	Hants	MERL	To 1931	250-1500	Owned	Probably mixed
14	Brampton Ash	Northants	RO (Norfolk)	To 1931	Estimated 720	Tenant	Mostly livestock
15	Blakesley village	Northants	MERL	To 1929	140	Not known	Not known
16	Elton Hall	Northants	Private	To 1928	816	Owned	Mixed
17	Elmfield Farm	Northants	Private	1924-1932	231	Bought 1921	Mixed
18	Ampney Sheephouse farm	Gloucs	RO	1925-1931	Estimated 200	Not known	Mixed
19	Sibford Ferris	Oxon	Private	1915-1926	281	Owned	Mixed
20	Canning Howard family	Warwicks	RO	1916-1929	Not known	Not known	Not known
21	Islip Lodge	Northants	Private	1919-1926	240	Tenant	Mixed
22	Groby Park	Leics	RO	Intermittent	Not known	Owned	Prob. Livestock & dairy
23	Todd family	Bucks	RO	1926-1939	Not known	Not known	Livestock
24	York Farm, West Hagbourne	Oxon	Private	1927-1939	Estimated 450	Probably owned	Mixed
25	Grounds Farm	Oxon	MERL	1928-1939	398	Probably owned	Mixed
26	Radford Farm	Oxon	Private	1930-1939	500	Owned	Livestock
27	Pilton Lodge	Northants	RO (Leics)	1931-1939	612	Not known	Mixed

28	Kingston family	Northants	RO	1931-1939	Estimated 180	Not known	Livestock
29	Halfway Farm	Berkshire	MERL	1931-1939	330-396	Not known	Livestock & dairy
30	Manor Farm, Shilton	Oxon	MERL	1932-1940	365	Owned	Mixed
31	Queniborough village	Leics	MERL	1933-1940	Estimated 100+	Not known	Dairy & poultry
32	Abbots Ripton Estate	Hunts	RO	1934-1939	Estimated 500	Owned	Mixed
33	Oathill Farm	Oxon	Private	Qualitative only	85	Owned	Specialist poultry
34	Berkswell Hall Home Farm	Warwicks	RO	1929-1939	414	Owned	Mixed
35	Bloomhills Farm	Leics	Private	Qualitative only	1300	Not known	Livestock & dairy

Chapter 2

The farming background: economic and other trends, 1850-1918

The Golden Age, 1850-1875

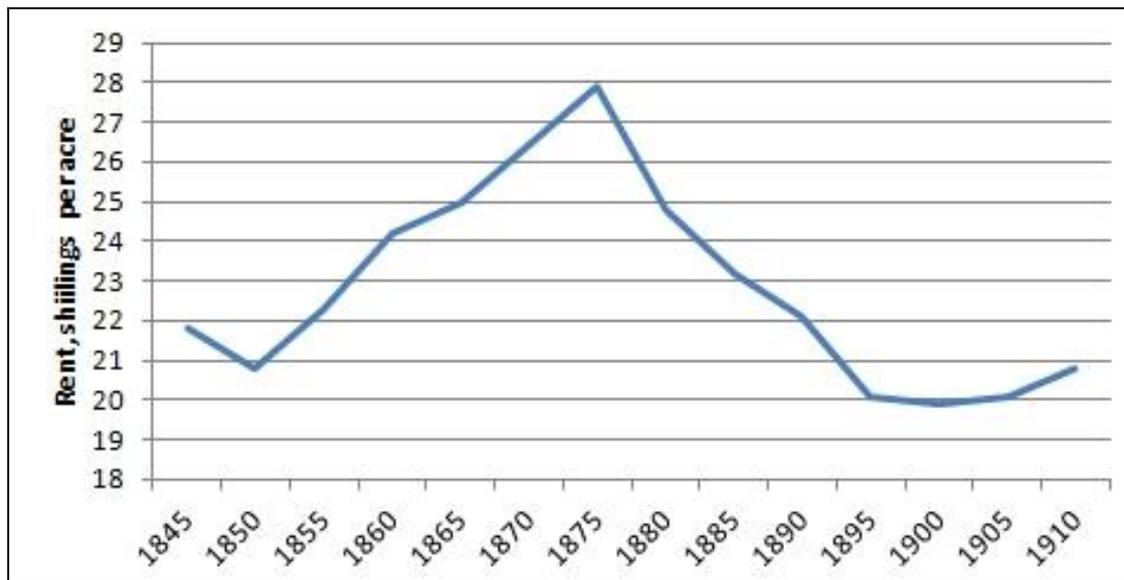
The reality of this description for this period has been called into question by many academics, and the author's own researches doubted the validity of such terminology.¹ Collins postulated that agricultural growth rates were lower, at about 0.8 percent *p.a.*, in the period 1850-1875 than they had been in the second quarter of the nineteenth century, when they had been growing at about twice that rate² He contended that the reasons were a limit to labour productivity and the biological potential of nineteenth century plants, with beef production and crop yields levelling off compared with the second quarter of the 1800s, whilst fertiliser and feedstuff inputs were increasing rapidly. Also 'High Farming', a tag also applied to this period, could only be practised by the larger and wealthier estates as it involved the high cost of drainage, of mechanisation and advanced organisation of the farming unit, with attendant adverse impact on profitability. So, from the evidence, the conclusion appears to be that landowners and labourers did well, but farmers may not have done. Certainly rents rose considerably as shown by Figure 2.1.³ So it had been a golden age for some, but not for others.

¹ M. Heaton, *A Farming History of Spratton, 1766-1914* (Spratton, 2009).

² E. J. T. Collins, 'Did mid-Victorian agriculture fail?', *Recent Findings of Research in Economic and Social History (occasional papers of the Economic History Society)*, 21 (1995), *passim*.

³ Graph prepared by author from M. Turner *et al*, *Agricultural Rent in England, 1690-1914* (Cambridge 2004), pp. 312-313. The graph is based on figures of rents received, not rents assessed.

Figure 2.1: *Agricultural rent in England, 1845-1910*



Three particular themes are considered; the background to the break-up of some of the major estates, a process which started just before the Great War and reached its zenith in 1919; the reduction in arable, which started in the 1870s and was only interrupted briefly by the ploughing-up campaigns of the two World Wars; and the increase in imports of grain and livestock. The result of the first was very significant ownership changes, which started before the Great War and continued after it, with sales often but not always, to the tenant farmers. This divestment had, in its background, social changes afoot at the end of the nineteenth century. The farming depression that started in the mid-1870s may have set in motion this process among the landed gentry. In Northamptonshire, for example, this break-up resulted in only 25 estates remaining intact. Some of the reductions and break-ups in Northamptonshire are shown in Table 2.1.⁴

⁴ K. Cahill, *Who Owns Britain* (Edinburgh, 2002), p. 249. The acreages in 2012 were taken from various internet sources.

Table 2.1: *Largest landowners in Northamptonshire in 1872 and 2012*

	Main estates in Northamptonshire	Acres 1872	Acres 2012
Duke of Buccleuch & Queensbury	Boughton	17,965	11,000
Earl Spencer	Althorp	16,800	13,000
Marquess of Exeter	Burghley	15,625	12,700
Lord Overstone	Overstone	15,045	
Duke of Grafton	Wakefield	14,507	
Marquess of Northampton	Castle Ashby	9,649	15,000
Sir James Hay Langham	Cottesbrooke	9,118	2,400
Sir Rainald Knightley	Fawsley	8,041	
Lord Lilford	Lilford, Oundle	7,998	
Countess of Cardigan	Deene Park	7,210	

The consequence of this break-up was that, at the start of the very difficult interwar farming period, many erstwhile tenants had only just acquired their farms, often at the much higher values that pertained immediately after the end of the Great War, inflated by the farming ‘boom’ that occurred during that war.

Depression after 1875

A very good summary of the period of depression after 1875 comes from A. G. Street’s *The Gentleman of the Party*, which while a work of fiction, is clearly well researched and appears to be based on actual events.⁵ In Wiltshire where he farmed, the depression did not set in until 1879. Problems started with the very wet weather of the winter of 1878 and summer of 1879, described as ‘Rain, snow or sleet every damn day since last September... All the summer it rained, and it rained and it rained. The hay was cut in early June, and there it stayed until August, in many cases never being picked up’.⁶

⁵ A. Street, *The Gentleman of the Party* (London, 1936), pp. 42-46.

⁶ Street, *The Gentleman of the Party*, pp. 43-44. There is no station data from this period for Wiltshire, where Street’s mythical farm is situated, the nearest being Southampton, see The Meteorological Office, ‘Southampton data’,

It was still a landlord's market with Street's fictional Earl commenting, in 1879, that when a tenant farmer can afford to keep half a dozen hunters for himself and his family, and to hunt three days a week, there was no need to reduce his rent. When the downturn came, it came quickly, with suddenly 'the boot on the other foot' and landlords imploring a tenant to take a farm for which, a little over a year before, the same tenant had been unable to arrive at 'sensible' terms. So, this was the start of the 'coming of the grass', with landowners forced to pay the cost of conversion when they were unable to find arable tenants. Thus, in 1880 or thereabouts, the fictional Earl of Ashton found that he had to agree to 200 acres of his Sutton Manor being sown to pasture with the attendant cost of seed, fencing and even cow stalls as the farm was progressively turned over to dairying.⁷ The fictional farm, which had been sold for £27,000 in 1812, only raised £7000 in 1892 when it was rented for £275 *p.a.*, but with the landlord paying the £196 tithe.⁸ As to rent, it had moved from £1 per acre in 1852, up to 28s in 1875, but was languishing at 12/6d in 1894.⁹ Graphically, the elements of the depression can be seen from the fall in real rents, already shown in Figure 2.1 on page 35, and the estimated change in imports of a number of farm products between 1854 and 1896, shown in Table 2.2 and supported by Figure 2.2.¹⁰

<http://www.metoffice.gov.uk/climate/uk/stationdata/southamptondata.txt>, [accessed 25 February 2012]. Both this data and the Oxford data, <http://www.metoffice.gov.uk/climate/uk/stationdata/oxforddata.txt> [accessed 25 February 2012] record a wetter January and February than average, but both record extremely high rainfall figures for the June to-August period of 1879, 402mm in Southampton and 326mm in Oxford. Oxford records another high level for the same months in 1880, with 155mm in July.

⁷ Street, *The Gentleman of the Party*, pp. 48-53.

⁸ Street, *The Gentleman of the Party*, p. 91.

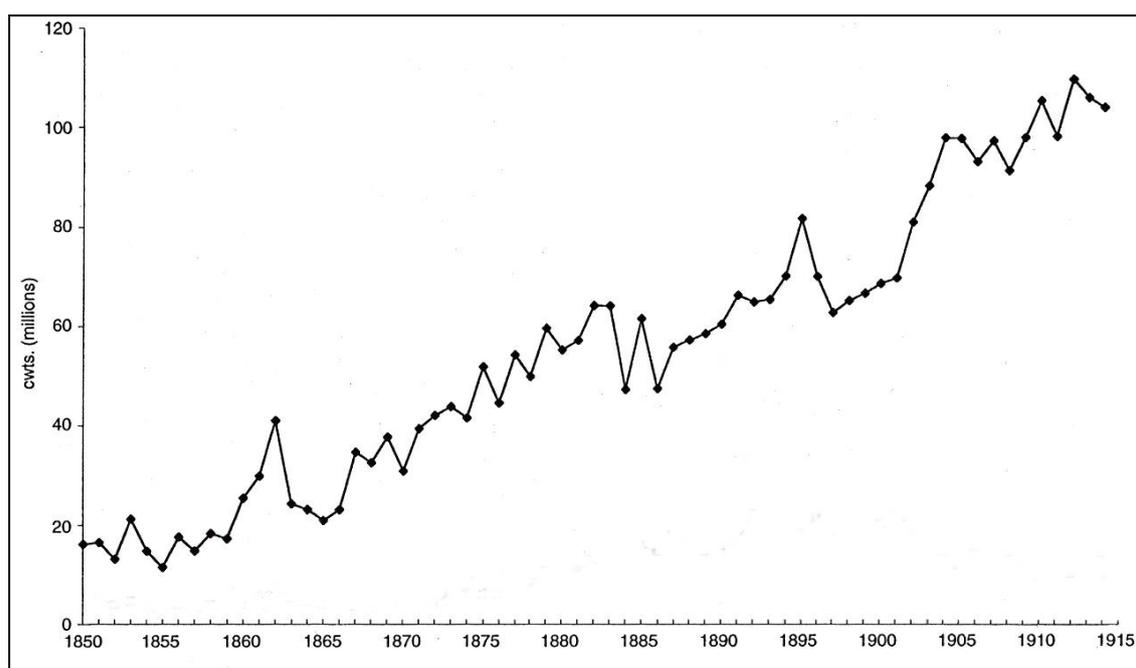
⁹ Street, *The Gentleman of the Party*, p. 94.

¹⁰ R. Rew, 'British agriculture under free trade, 1846-1896', *Journal of the Farmers' Club* (London, December 1897), p. 33. Graph created by author from B. Afton *et al*, 'The statistical

Table 2.2: Imports of farm products, 1854-1896

	1854		1896	
	No. million	£m	No. million	£m
Live cattle and sheep	0.3	1.4	1.3	10.4
	Cwts.	£m	Cwts	£m
Wheat	14.9	11.7	70.0	21.7
Barley	2.0	0.8	22.2	5.7
Oats	2.8	1.4	17.6	4.2
Maize	5.8	2.7	51.8	9.4
Wheat flour	3.6	4.0	21.3	9.2
Wool	106.1	6.5	713.6	25.3
All products (inc. others not shown) competing with British farm products		36.4		139.0

Figure 2.2: Wheat imports into the United Kingdom, 1850-1915

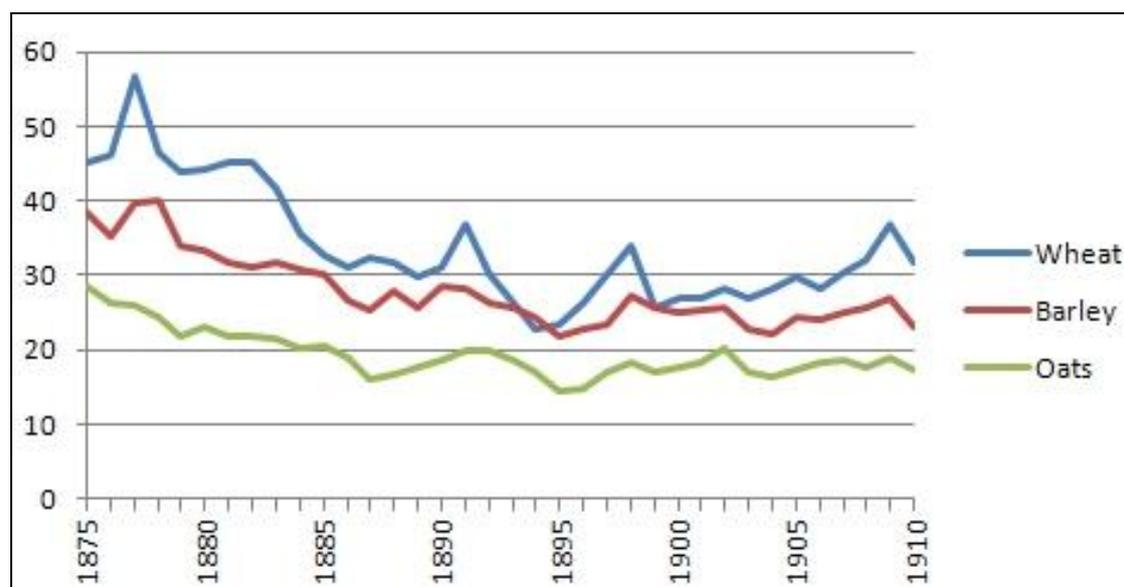


There was a fall in corn prices from 1875-1895, after which these levelled out, as shown in Figure 2.3.¹¹

base of agricultural performance in England and Wales, 1850-1914', in E. J. T. Collins (ed.), *The Agrarian History of England and Wales, Volume 7 (Cambridge, 2000)*, p. 2127.

¹¹ Graph created by author from figures in Afton, 'Statistical base of agricultural performance in England and Wales', pp. 2044-2045.

Figure 2.3: *Corn prices in England, 1875-1910*

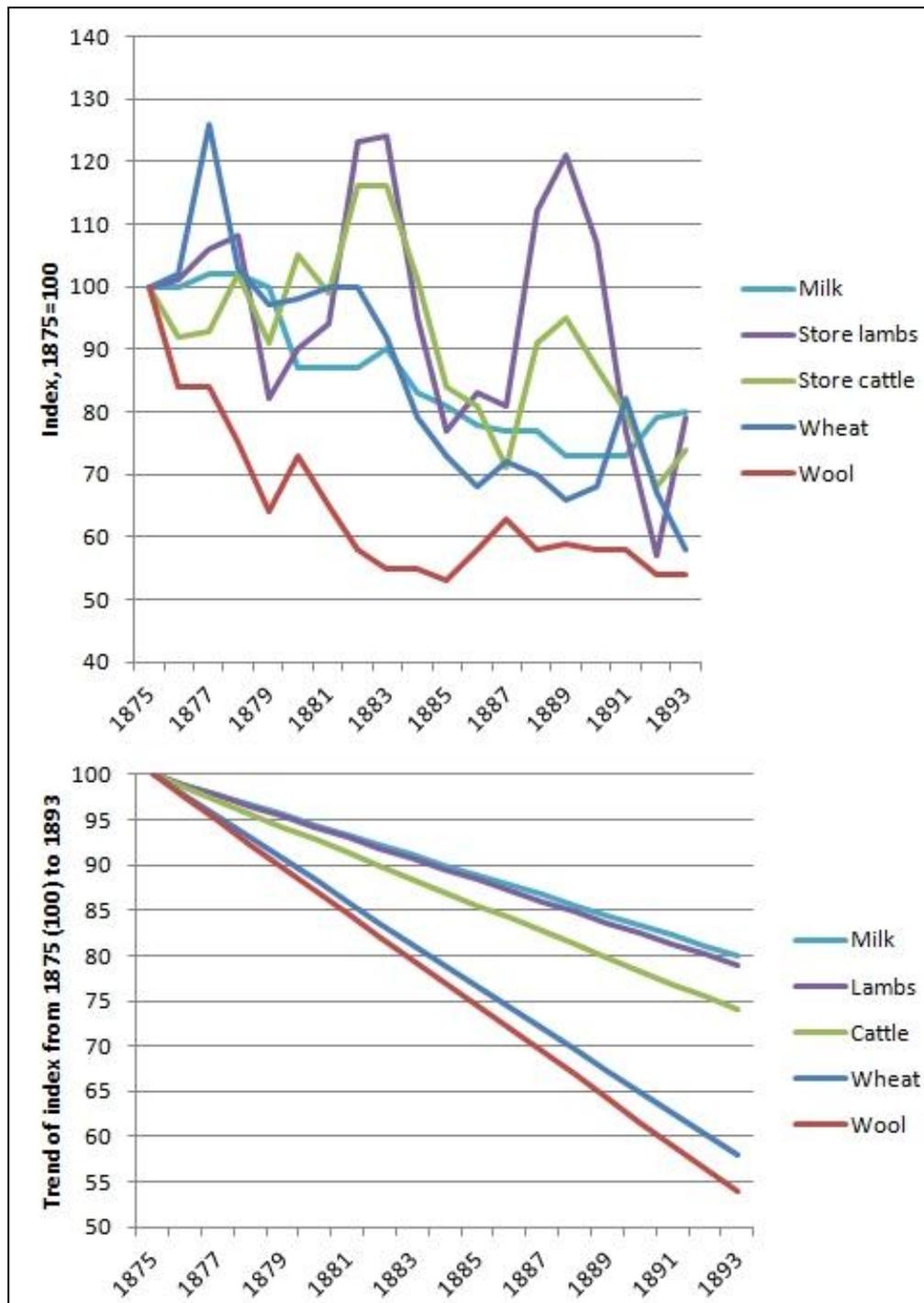


While agricultural prices fell, this was not in isolation as the prices of all commodities dropped some 40 percent in the period 1873-1896.¹² As can be seen in the upper part of Figure 2.4, the price movements were quite erratic.¹³ The lower part of Figure 2.4 shows the straight-line trend of each of these five agricultural products from a common starting point using the figures for 1875 and 1893 only. It is accepted that this trend line depends on the starting and closing dates chosen but, nevertheless, this does show clearly the relative drops of these different products, and the percentage declines over this 18-year period. Milk and store lambs out-performed the other products, and the biggest drops came from wheat and wool.

¹² R. Perren, *Agriculture in Depression, 1870-1940* (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 9-10.

¹³ Graph created by the author. The wheat index is derived from the figures used for Figure 2.3. The indices for wool and store livestock are derived from E. Whetham, 'Livestock prices in Britain, 1851-93' in W. Minchinton (ed.), *Essays in Agrarian History, Volume 2* (British Agricultural History Society, 1968), p. 203. The milk index is derived from an unpublished paper: G. Clark, *The Price History of English Agriculture, 1209-1914* (University of California, 2003), pp. 69-70 (un-numbered).

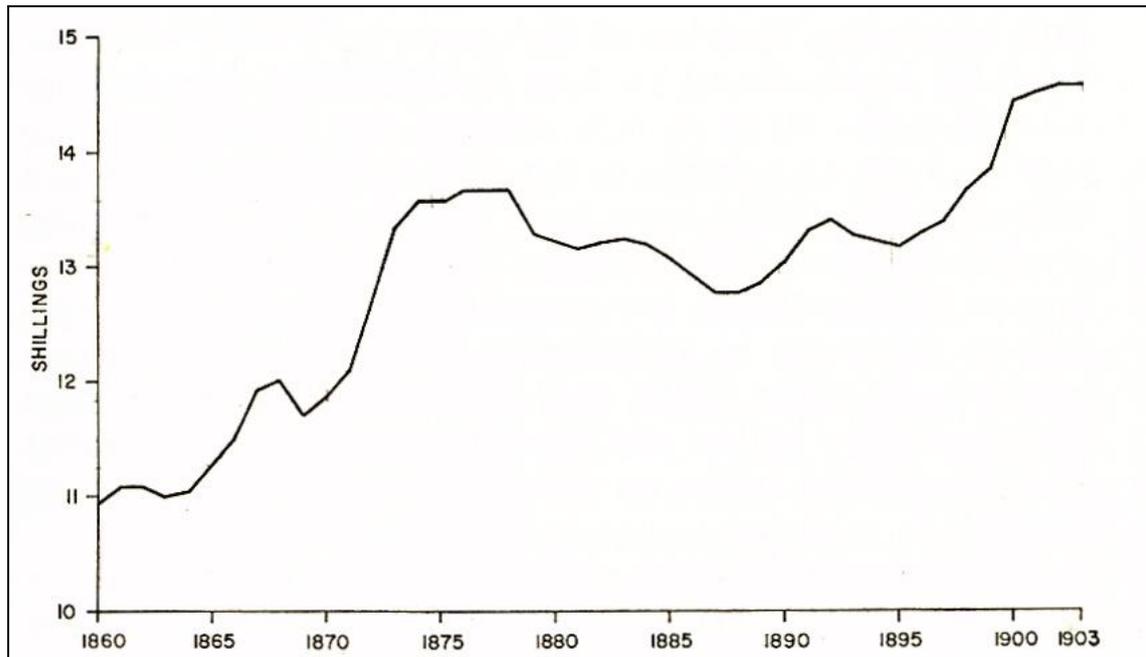
Figure 2.4: Indices of wheat, wool, livestock and milk prices, and trends, 1875-1893



There was a slight off-setting of farm-workers' wages, but the drop was only about five percent, as shown in Figure 2.5.¹⁴

¹⁴ Graph reproduced from P. Perry, *British Farming in the Great Depression 1870-1914: An Historical Geography* (Newton Abbott, 1974), p. 127. It is based on a sample of 69 farms from official statistics.

Figure 2.5: *Farm-workers' wages, 1860-1903*



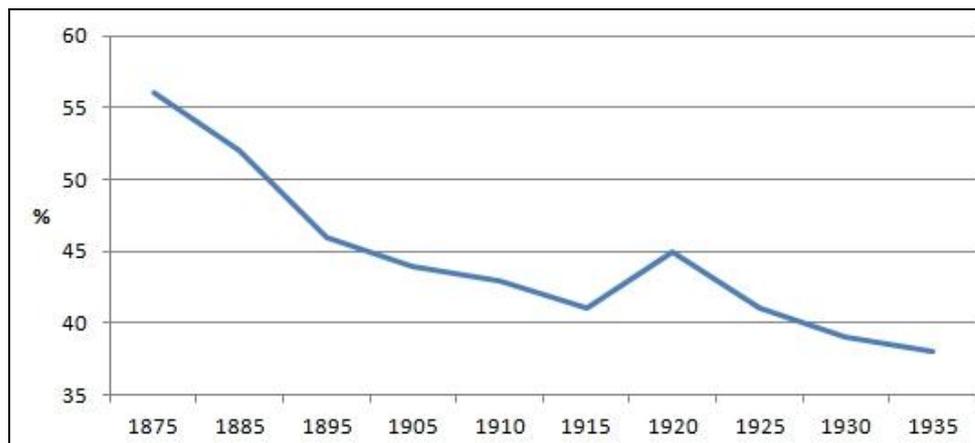
Although the major fall in the corn price took place in the late 1870s, the move away from arable had started before this, at the end of the 1860s or early 1870s. At this stage it was not particularly extensive, with a contemporary report in the 1875 *Journal of the Royal Agricultural Society of England*, backed up by 55 individual observations, of a fall of c. 150,000 acres of arable between 1870 and 1874, with pasture increasing by 750,000 acres.¹⁵ It is suspected that much of this addition results from more complete collection of returns by the Statistics Department. In a paper given to the Farmers' Club in 1897, Richard Rew noted that, over the period 1867-1896, there was a decline in the area under crops from 23m to 20m acres, with wheat falling from 3.1m to 1.6m acres over the same period; cattle numbers increasing from 7.95m to 10.94m; and sheep dropping slightly from 33.8m to 30.8m.¹⁶ While there had been an increase in wheat yield of around 10 percent, he felt that the biggest factor in the fall of wheat production was the drop in the

¹⁵ M. Evans *et al*, 'Report on laying down land to permanent pasture, *Journal of the Royal Agricultural Society of England*, Series 2, 11 (1875), pp. 442-509.

¹⁶ Rew, 'British agriculture under free trade, 1846-1896', pp. 25-45.

price. Rew concluded that the repeal of the Corn Laws had taken away the farmers' age-old advantage.¹⁷ The conservative farmers were slow to react to the changing economics and acceptance that 'stock pays best', preferring the almost 'holy grail' of the traditional four-course rotation system. The farmer of the day had no idea how prolonged or steep the fall in corn prices was to be, and farmers did not have the capital to branch out into alternative sectors. Nevertheless, this was the start of a movement into grass, which then gathered pace, as shown in Figure 2.6. Commentators, such as Sheail, identified the turning-point as 1873, but others saw it later in the 1870s, with figures up to 1914 sourced from Orwin.¹⁸

Figure 2.6: *Percentage of land under arable cultivation in Britain, 1875-1935*



The fall in wheat was quite dramatic reducing by 1895 by more than half in the arable districts, and even more for the grazing districts. Across all districts, approximately 3.5m acres was grassed down between 1875 and 1914 (the arable percentage dropping from 56 percent to 41 percent), with most of this having taken place by 1900, and with a

¹⁷ R. Hammond, 'British food supplies, 1914-1939', *Economic History Review*, 16 (1946), p.1.

¹⁸ The graph was created by the author from figures in C. Orwin et al., *History of British Agriculture 1846-1914* (Newton Abbott, 1964), pp. 251, 267 and 350 with the years from 1915 onwards from 1915 from MAFF, *A Century of Agricultural Statistics, Great Britain 1866-1966* (London, 1968), pp. 94-102. There is a very small variation in moving from one source to the other between 1910 and 1915, which has been smoothed out.

commensurate increase in cattle numbers.¹⁹ Figure 2.6 shows the long-term trend in the reduction in arable over the longer period 1875-1935.

Proper conversion to pasture was not for the faint-hearted. Writing in 1888, James Caird estimated that creating a good pasture could take ten years or more.²⁰ Because of the cost of this, there was a tendency for owner farmers to let it 'tumbledown' to create a temporary ley. Landowners, on the other hand might be forced to pay the cost if they were unable to find arable tenants. Consequently 'grassing-down' had not been profitable for the majority of farmers and was just an expedient. The nadir of the depression appears to have been in 1893 with Hunter Pringle reporting on the accounts of 18 farms totalling 7500 acres, of which twelve had an average loss of £450, with the remainder marginally in profit.²¹ In Warwickshire, according to Joseph Ashby of Tysoe, landlords were relatively unscathed; their larders were still stocked with game and poultry; there were horses for their daughters to ride; but these girls were now educated locally rather than at the nearest ladies' college.²²

Added to this was the decline in the number of years purchase that had occurred since this had peaked at 40 in the 1870s.²³ By 1895, it was not uncommon to find farms selling

¹⁹ G. Fussell, 'Progress of Northampton farming in three centuries' *The Journal of the Land Agents Society*, 38 (1939), pp. 249-259. J. Sheail, 'Elements of sustainable agriculture: the UK experience, 1840-1940', *Agricultural History Review*, 43. 2 (1995), pp 181-184.

²⁰ J. Caird, 'Recent experiences in laying down land to grass', *Journal of the Royal Agricultural Society of England*, Series 2, 24 (1888), pp. 124-156.

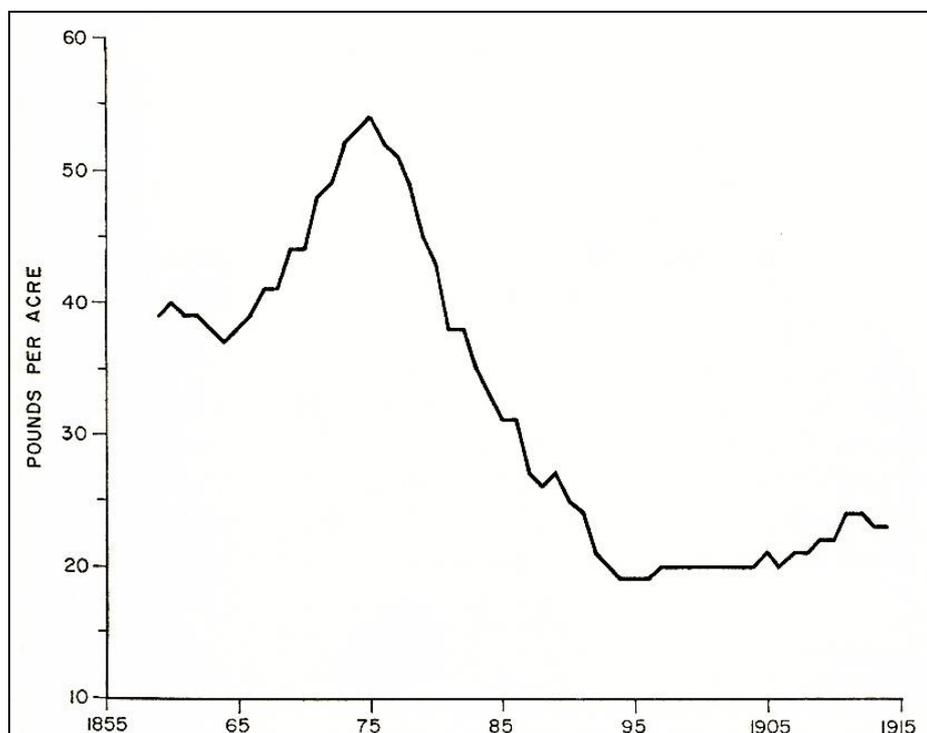
²¹ R. Hunter Pringle, *Royal Commission on Agriculture; Report on the Counties of Bedford, Huntingdon and Northampton* (HMSO, 1895), p. 34.

²² M. Ashby, *Joseph Ashby of Tysoe, 1859-1919* (Cambridge, 1961), p. 146.

²³ Years purchase is the multiplier of the rent to create the capital value.

at closer to 20 years purchase so, despite other factors which had depressed land values, the market values were reduced in some case by as much as a half, as in Figure 2.7.²⁴

Figure 2.7: *Farm sale prices, 1859-1914*



The effect on landlords was exemplified by a large estate in Northamptonshire where its outgoings, in support of their farming tenants, as a percentage of gross rents had averaged 36 percent over the period 1858-1878; had risen to 44 percent in 1891; 49 percent in 1892; and almost 60 percent in 1893. This was borne out by the reduction in receipts of tax on income from United Kingdom land, the old Schedule A, down in Northamptonshire from just over £1m in 1859 to £0.82m in 1895, a drop of 20 percent.²⁵ Care has to be taken with such figures, as they were not based on rents actually received,

²⁴ Reproduced from Perry, *British Farming*, p. 77.

²⁵ Hunter Pringle, *Royal Commission on Agriculture*, *passim*, in particular paragraphs 99 and 110. F. M. L. Thompson, 'An anatomy of English agriculture, 1870-1914', in B. Holderness *et al* (eds), *Land, Labour and Agriculture, 1700-1920: Essays for Gordon Mingay* (London, 1991), pp. 223-224.

rather assessments of rental values (including imputed values for owner-occupied land), these being re-assessed every three years and thus lagging behind events. No account either was taken of arrears, so they do not reflect what was coming into the landlord's pocket. Nevertheless, the changes are likely to indicate a trend, and these changes were of greater magnitude in the east of the country and less marked in the West Country and Wales, where there was an increase in Schedule A assessments in this period.²⁶

In 1887 and 1899 the landowner Albert Pell published articles in the *Journal of the Royal Agricultural Society of England*.²⁷ Pell, who had a family estate of over 1000 acres in the Isle of Ely, also rented 280 acres at Haselbech in Northamptonshire. He was also a member of parliament, and on the Council of the Royal Agricultural Society. Pell noted that investments by many landowners on their estates frequently resulted in these exceeding the market value of the estate. So, while by now, certain sections of society were starting to see landowners as men with too much advantage, Pell in his own words saw them rather differently:

We in England are at the present day but the heirs or successors of others who, whether they derived their original title in the wilderness and waste by patent, grant, conquest, diplomacy, or communal inheritance, generally got nothing, apart from wild animals and minerals, for the expenditure of toil and capital in the development of their acquisition, but the chance of remuneration.

He saw the landowners as rather more burdened by the need to carry on diligently the process of land improvement started by their predecessors, but with increasingly little recognition or thanks. Pell makes reference to the Heathcote estate in Oxfordshire, where

²⁶ Afton, 'The statistical base', pp. 1933-1935. Schedule A Income Tax was tax on income from land held in the United Kingdom.

²⁷ A. Pell, 'The making of the land in England; a retrospect', *Journal of the Royal Agricultural Society of England*, 23 (1887), pp. 355-374. A. Pell, 'The making of the land in England; a second retrospect', *Journal of the Royal Agricultural Society of England*, 10 (1899), pp. 136-141.

sufficient information is available to show that this landowner would have been better off putting the money in the bank, 'even if none of the improvements had been attempted, tenants would still have been found to keep the land in a reasonably productive, and therefore profitable, condition'.

Recovery

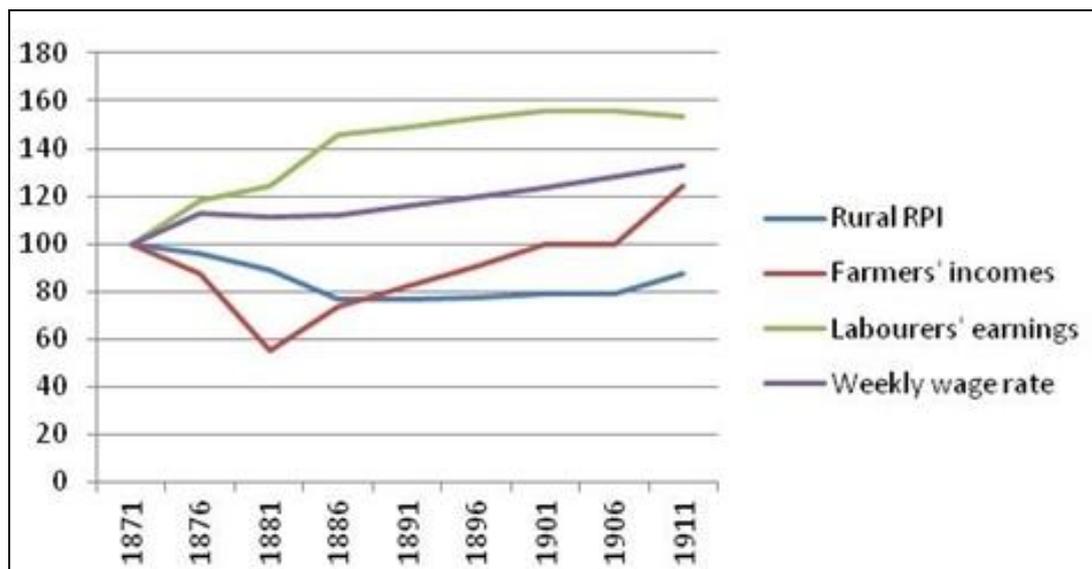
Looking back, it can be seen that recovery started around 1896-1897. This did not result in a return to arable, with this decreasing still further in the period up to the start of the Great War, as shown in Figure 2.6, page 42. Farming incomes rose progressively in the period, with the 25 percent increase being accounted for almost entirely by livestock while crop incomes stagnated. The lion's share of this benefit went to the farmers, albeit with their relative benefit recovering from having almost halved in the period 1873-1896, as shown in Figure 2.8. The share for landlords continued to decline until the middle of the Edwardian period, and only then started to increase.²⁸ In Northamptonshire between 1895 and 1912, this is shown by a drop in amounts assessed, to Schedule A income from UK land of some 10 percent, probably reflecting the still increasing expenditure by landlords, despite static rents.²⁹ As a consequence, landlords' share of agricultural income, which had been around 22-23 percent between 1860 and the early 1890s, now dropped to 18 percent on the eve of the war. The cumulative trend on landlords' incomes, down in Northamptonshire by 28 percent since 1860, was a drain that only those with incomes from other sources were able to shoulder relatively easily.

²⁸ E. J. T. Collins, 'Rural and agricultural change; the recovery, 1897-1914', in Collins, *Agrarian History, Volume VII*, pp. 208-223. Thompson, 'An anatomy of English agriculture', p. 221. J. Bellerby, 'Distribution of farm income in the United Kingdom, 1867-1938', *Journal of Proceedings of the Agricultural Economic Society*, 10 (1953), reprinted in *Essays in Agrarian History, Volume 2*, (British Agricultural History Society, 1968), pp. 261-274.

²⁹ F. M. L. Thompson, *English Landed Society in the Nineteenth Century* (London, 1963), p. 310.

Until the middle of the first decade of the twentieth century, the farmer had fared badly with his so-called ‘incentive income’ lagging behind the labourer’s weekly wage, and not exceeding this again until the period immediately before the Great War. This is shown in Figure 2.8 based on Bellerby’s complex ‘Index of Farmers’ and Relatives’ Real Incentive Income per man-week’, shown as ‘Farmers’ Incomes’.³⁰ Alongside these are shown the Rural Retail Price Index, the index of Farm Labourers’ Real Weekly Earnings (shown on the graph as ‘Labourers’ Earnings’), and the weekly wage rate. By the early 1900s, the farmer found his share of income restored to the level reached in 1871, and this then gathered pace with 1911 seeing the best conditions since 1870.

Figure 2.8: *Indicative trends of RPI and farming incomes, 1871-1911*



This uplift in farmers’ fortunes explains their enthusiasm to buy their own farms when landlords began to divest at the beginning of the twentieth century, with a few such sales

³⁰ M. Turner, ‘Agricultural output, income and productivity’, in Collins, *Agrarian History, Volume VII*, p. 307. Bellerby, ‘Distribution of farm income’, pp. 270-278. The figures that are quoted in the cited article span numbers of years which are not a constant period of years for the index figures that he quotes. Figures have, therefore, been estimated to show the trend at five yearly intervals and, while the individual points on the graph may not be absolute, the trends of all the indices are clear.

just before the Great War. Nationally this improvement in fortunes is reflected by the numbers of bankruptcies, which had peaked in 1881-1883; had been around 500 a year towards the end of the depression; but by 1910 had dropped away to half this level, as shown in Table 2.3.³¹ Even at their peak, the rate only equated to one in 150-350 farmers, so it was hardly a catastrophic failure of farming.

Table 2.3: *Farming bankruptcies, 1892-1918*

Years	Annual average
1892-1898	453
1899-1905	315
1906-1912	299
1913-1918	137

Figure 2.8 also shows that the labourer had gained, at the expense of the farmer, throughout the period of the depression from 1875-1895, but that after that the labourer's share of the agricultural income went into a slight decline. This reinforces the point that, from 1906, farmers had almost everything on their side for this period up to the Great War, static rents, at best static wage cost, but corn prices on the rise as shown in Figure 2.3, page 39. So for farmers it was a period of increasing prosperity. Agricultural wage rates were about half those of industrial wage rates; agricultural workers unions in the 1900s were ill-financed; and the strike by the Eastern Counties Agricultural Labourers' and Small Holders' Union in 1910 had collapsed due to lack of funds.³² Workers did not share in the better farming times.

³¹ Collins, 'Rural and agricultural change; the recovery, 1897-1914', pp. 211.

³² F. Green, *A History of the English Agricultural Labourer 1870-1920* (London, 1920), pp. 160-181.

As the new century dawned, popular sentiment about farming was much influenced by Rider Haggard's account, based on his 1902 tour, which described agriculture as a failing industry mainly due to the 'lowness of prices'.³³ The desertion of labourers to towns and cities had threatened to throttle supplies with nothing 'short of actual starvation' likely to force people back onto the land. Perhaps Haggard was unduly influenced by farmers harking back to the period of depression, for Street saw the improvement in the farmers' lot.³⁴ In 1902, his fictitious farmer's son had negotiated with his father's landlord to take a farm of 150 acres and while he had had to pay more than the £1 per acre, which was the considered going rate, this had been at the cost to the landlord of a raft of improvements relating to converting 50 acres from arable to pasture for dairying. When the son was married the next year, there were 'one hundred guests at the wedding, there was champagne for everyone present, and cider *ad lib* for the farm men and their wives' despite the apparently parlous state of agriculture.³⁵ So, there was disbelief from Street's characters about Haggard's warning, that 'unless something unforeseen occurs farming must come to an end for lack of labour', with Street adding:

They hoodwinked this feller, Mary... 'Cording to him, most of us are on our last legs... Dad still hunts an' shoots, an' I'm having a day's rabbitin' to-morrow'... I tell you that if this writin' chap had stuck to books like *Kings Solomon's Mines* he'd been a wiser man. That was a book if you like. This'n's just plain flapdoodle for townsfolk to read.³⁶

Even though Street's fictional landowner's agent was saying in 1902 that 'the landlord's been getting the thin end of the stick for some years', the time had not yet arrived for the

³³ H. Rider Haggard, *Rural England, Volume II* (London, 1906), p. 541.

³⁴ Street, *The Gentleman of the Party*, pp. 112-113.

³⁵ Street, *The Gentleman of the Party*, p. 116.

³⁶ Street, *The Gentleman of the Party*, pp. 116-117.

landed gentry to start moving out of estate farming.³⁷ Landed influence in parliament was on the wane, and MPs chose to overlook the large amount of rural employment that such estates provided, despite these large houses being maintained at a cost which often exceeded the income of the estate. Death duties on landed estates were introduced in 1894, albeit only on estates valued at more than £2m and at a tax rate of 8 percent. As later events were to show, this also contributed to the relentless decline of English landed society, something foreseen by the monarch of the time, if not her ministers. Queen Victoria wrote to the then chancellor, Sir William Harcourt on 5 June 1894 stating that ‘the Queen is much concerned about the provisions made in the Budget which in her opinion cannot fail to cripple all landowners’.³⁸ Harcourt replied that this was an over-reaction, but the Queen appears to have ‘had the last laugh’ as, by an extreme irony, he found himself on the wrong end of this tax as a result of an estate left to him by a nephew. Harcourt had to face the reality of running such an estate, commenting that ‘landowning is a more troublesome and less profitable business than even public affairs’. In 1908-1909, Lloyd George, with his deep-seated dislike of large landowners, carried through a series of laws and land taxes, the implementation of the latter requiring the revaluation of land, which was completed in 1910 and was much hated by many at the time, but now is a valuable source of information for historians. Lloyd George’s 1909 budget was voted down by the landowners in the House of Lords, leading eventually to the Parliament Bill of 1911, which emasculated the upper chamber.

Although the proposed land tax of 20 percent of the increase in value at the point of sale was dropped, landowners knew that they were under attack, and this increased sales of

³⁷ Street, *The Gentleman of the Party*, p. 113.

³⁸ *CL*, LXII, 1592 (23 July 1927), p. 138.

land, usually of peripheral parts of the estate. Some like the Duke of Bedford, who started selling in 1909, made a virtue out of it, on account of the greater return from stocks and shares. The ‘flood’ of land sales from 1910, to which Thompson refers, is backed up by the number of sale catalogues deposited at the Northamptonshire Record Office.³⁹ Figure 2.7, page 44, suggests that prices were marginally higher than they had been in 1895 (but still a long way short of their peak in the early 1870s), but the local evidence did not support this. One sale of significance was the Wakefield Estate, part of the Duke of Grafton’s Estate, which was auctioned in June 1913. While almost all the cottage lots were sold, the farms and small-holdings did not fare so well with most being withdrawn, and with no sales at all of farms over 100 acres. Bids were made for the three larger farms of c. 300 acres, but these only reached prices of between £12 and £17 per acre before being withdrawn, with corresponding years purchase figures of about 20. Rents of the larger farms were close to 12s per acre, although one of 400 acres with a superior farmhouse was let at 18s per acre. Very much higher prices were obtained when the Duke returned to the auction room in 1919.⁴⁰ So, if a recovery in farming had occurred as the country went to war, the benefits had not accrued to the landowners in terms of land values, at a time when many had perhaps set themselves on a course of some divestment. The prestige of land holding was now in the early stages of decline, carrying with it a change in social habits, with increased foreign travel and golf filling some of the voids. Edwardian society saw the final days of this era of a landed gentry, which no longer needed land for social status, and found more profitable avenues in which to invest.

³⁹ Thompson, *English Landed Society*, pp. 321-326. M. Beard, *English Landed Society in the Twentieth Century* (London, 1989), pp. 8-13.

⁴⁰ NRO, SC107.

The Great War

In the first two years of the Great War, there were bumper harvests, so it was only necessary for government to exhort farmers to grow more wheat. Without any price guarantees, this approach was described by a Leicestershire farmer with the riposte ‘to my mind they consider farmers a lot of asses’.⁴¹ Nevertheless the total area in tillage in 1915 was 20 percent higher than in 1914; and the largest acreage since 1891.⁴² It became clear that this would not achieve sufficient home production so, following on from a Board of Agriculture report in June 1915, County War Agricultural Committees, comprised of landowners, farmers and labourers, were set up. However, with the U-boat campaign not yet in full swing, the government felt that any proposal to abandon forcibly existing rotations and to plough up grass land would be premature.⁴³ After the poor harvest in 1916 and the change in government in December 1916, a real sense of urgency was injected, and this was backed by the appointment of Rowland Protheroe (later Lord Ernle) as president of the Board of Agriculture.⁴⁴ Powers were taken which required land to be used so as to increase or maintain the food supply of the country.⁴⁵ These powers were devolved down to the county committees, who were set a target of getting three million acres reclaimed by the summer of 1918. While the farming community doubted the wisdom of ploughing-up grassland to grow wheat, nevertheless an increase in arable of just over three million acres to 12.4m acres was achieved by 1918, with grass reducing

⁴¹ P. Horn, *Rural Life in England in The First World War* (Dublin, 1984), p. 47.

⁴² Horn, *Rural Life*, p. 48.

⁴³ Horn, *Rural Life*, p. 49.

⁴⁴ Horn, *Rural Life*, p. 51.

⁴⁵ Defence of the Realm Manual, (HMSO, various editions), *passim*. Horn, *Rural Life*, pp. 51-52. T. Middleton, *Food Production in War* (London, 1923), pp. 166-167.

by the same amount.⁴⁶ Within these figures, the area of wheat rose from 1.91m acres in 1916 to 2.56m in 1918, and potatoes from 0.43m to 0.63m acres over the same period.⁴⁷

The Corn Production Act of 1917 undertook to guarantee the price of wheat and oats (but not barley) for six years, at 60s per quarter in 1917, 55s for the next two years, and 45s from 1920-1922.⁴⁸ The arrangement was to be reviewed in 1920. In practice, market prices held above these minimum prices throughout the war period. At the beginning of the war, the price of a quarter of wheat had stood at 34/2d; it had risen to 55/11d by May 1915; and the initial guaranteed price for wheat was to be 60s per quarter, and for oats 38/6d.⁴⁹ In Table 2.4, the indices of some farm products, compared to a base of 100 in 1913-1914, show the huge rises in prices that occurred, for years beginning 1 June.⁵⁰

Table 2.4: *Farm produce price indices, 1914-1919*

	1914-1915	1915-1916	1916-1917	1917-1918	1918-1919
Cereals	130	168	217	234	234
Livestock	105	128	158	193	196
Dairy produce	103	132	166	197	258
Potatoes	113	142	305	207	247

At the start of the war, many agricultural labourers had enlisted, often not so much out of patriotism but to get away from what appeared a wretched lifestyle. The worker was now

⁴⁶ Perren, *Agriculture in Depression*, pp 31-34.

⁴⁷ Sheail, 'Land improvement and reclamation', pp. 110-111.

⁴⁸ Horn, *Rural Life in England*, p. 60.

⁴⁹ Brown, *Agriculture in England*, pp. 60-1. A quarter is defined as 504lb of wheat, 448 lb of barley, 336 lb of oats as shown in Green, *A History of the English Agricultural Labourer*, p. 314.

⁵⁰ Royal Commission on Agriculture 1919, quoted in Brown, *Agriculture in England*, p. 61.

able to walk out and join the army as Blythe records so graphically.⁵¹ With around a quarter of a million agricultural labourers having left the land, the hardest problem was finding sufficient labour, but this was solved, numerically, by a combination of soldiers, prisoners of war, the first Women's Land Army (formed in 1917) and village women.⁵² These were both unskilled and unused to such work, so did not produce an efficient work force. The problem was compounded by the depletion of horses, with 140,000 being taken off the land within the first two weeks and one million during the course of the war, and tractor power was not yet available to any great extent.⁵³ Minimum wages for agricultural workers were introduced, these being set at 25s, a huge increase on pre-war rates, with the average worker earning 16/9d per week in 1914, 30/6d in 1918-1919 and 46/10½d in 1920-1921.⁵⁴ These rates are broadly confirmed by the diaries of the Gibbard family of Bloxham Road, Banbury, who were running a mixed farm of 165 acres with five to six labourers over the wartime period.⁵⁵ The rates have been converted into an index, shown in Figure 2.9, together with the cost of living and wheat price indices, with a base of 100 in 1914.⁵⁶

⁵¹ R. Blythe, *Akenfield: Portrait of an English Village* (London, 1969), pp. 33, 41.

⁵² E. Whetham, *The Agrarian History of England and Wales, Volume 8 1914-1939* (Cambridge, 1978), p. 71. G. E. Mingay, *A Social History of the English Countryside* (London, 1990), p. 200.

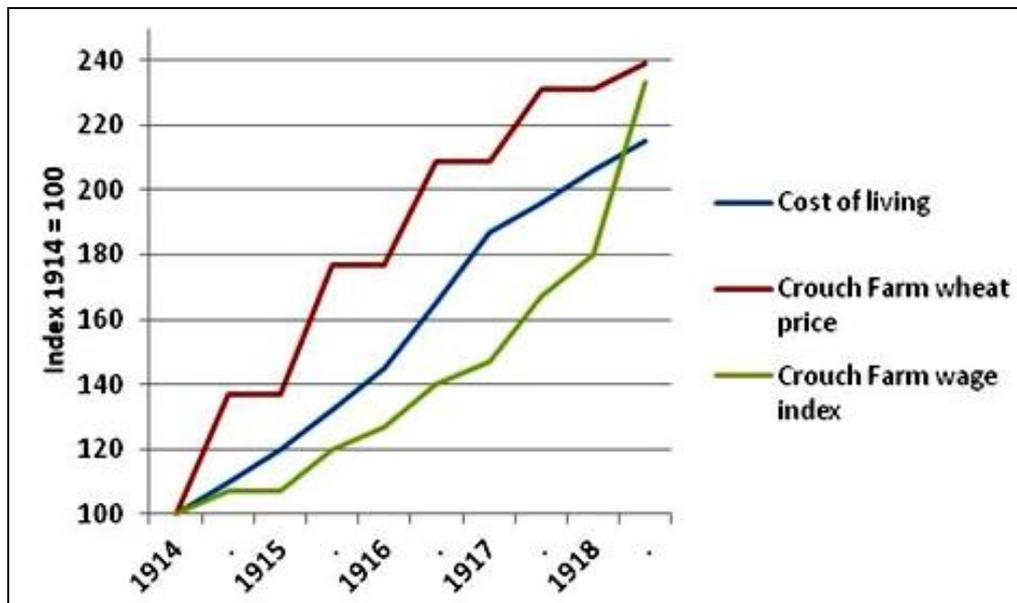
⁵³ Channel 4, 'War Horse: The Real Story' (4 March 2012).

⁵⁴ Mingay, *A Social History*, p. 202.

⁵⁵ Gibbard diaries.

⁵⁶ Cost of living indices for 1914-1918 developed from Green, *A History of the English Agricultural Labourer*, pp. 259-331. F. Green was a member of the Royal Commission on Agriculture of 1920. The 1919 figure was derived from the Bank of England inflation calculator.

Figure 2.9: *Indices of wages and wheat price at Crouch Farm, alongside the cost of living, 1914-1918*



Between 1914 and 1918, the increase in the percentage of the nation's food that was home grown rose in calorie terms from 38 percent in 1914 to 47 percent in 1918.⁵⁷

Despite producing more of the nation's food, the effect of ploughing-up was to transfer farm outputs from the higher value products, particularly meat, to the lower value cereals.⁵⁸ So, outputs, which had risen from £166m before the war to £171.5m in 1914, had fallen back slightly to £168m in 1915. By 1916, they were even lower at £162m, ending the war in 1918 at £155m.⁵⁹ Net farm incomes rose from £58m in 1914 to £173m in 1918. With little profit in farming before the war, profits on capital rose from two percent in 1914 to 10.6 percent in 1917, which Dewey considered to be the peak of

⁵⁷ P. Dewey, *British Agriculture in the First World War* (London, 1989), p. 227. The percentages in his table, which show 47 percent in 1918, include the effect of food control by the Food Production Department of the Ministry of Agriculture. The 'raw' home production percentage is, however, 40 percent.

⁵⁸ Dewey, *British Agriculture*, p. 247.

⁵⁹ Dewey, *British Agriculture*, p. 212.

profitability before wage rates increased during 1917.⁶⁰ So as the war drew to a close, farming was subject to very far-reaching controls with the marketing of farm products effectively a government monopoly. This blueprint swept aside the old *laissez-faire* approach to agriculture, but not for long, as will be shown in the next chapter.⁶¹

The war had seen considerable change in the fortunes of farmers, now probably better off than they had been since the 1860s and early 1870s, and the lot of labourers had also improved. However, little had changed for the landowner in terms of the economics of holding land, with all the downsides that had existed before the war still in place and, perhaps, the government controls of the 1917 Act making them doubt whether they retained much control over their own destinies. Landowners were now seeing profits ‘oozing out of the farmers’, while they were constrained from increasing rents. Security of tenure did not apply when an estate changed hands, and this often meant that farmers were being forced out, a cause taken up in 1918 by the National Farmers’ Union who, at the very least, wanted security of tenure while the war lasted. One very significant change had taken place, and that is that there was now an enthusiastic body of purchasers, the farmers themselves, who saw a future cushioned by government’s price guarantees, and were prepared to buy as an alternative to being given notice to quit. The sale of estates or parts of estates, which had started hesitantly before the war, now took hold in earnest, spurred on ever further as interest on gilt-edged securities now looked a better bet than leasing farmland.⁶²

⁶⁰ P. Dewey, ‘British farming profits and government policy during the First World War’, *The Economic History Review*, 2nd series, 37. 3 (1984), pp. 374-348.

⁶¹ Sheail, ‘Land improvement and reclamation’, pp. 110-124. Perren, *Agriculture in Depression*, p. 33.

⁶² Horn, *Rural Life in England*, pp. 61-62, 201.

Street reckoned that it was ‘impossible to lose money at farming just then’.⁶³ However, the Northamptonshire NFU minutes of 1918 hardly echo this and do not suggest a contented and prosperous farming community, cushioned by price guarantees. According to the committee, milk production was ‘no longer viable’, and ‘hundreds’ of farmers were being given notice to quit by landowners who wanted to sell, thus pocketing the improvements by the tenant before then re-letting at a higher rent, often as much as double.⁶⁴ Then there was protest about the unbelievable proposal that, in the middle of war, the Wages Board were proposing the shortening of labourer’s hours; and there was protest about taking yet more men off the land to go and fight.⁶⁵

On February 8 1919, in what appears to be the final report of the Northamptonshire War Agricultural Committee, it summarised its work over the 24 months since the Cultivation of Lands Order came into force. Their initial survey of the county in 1917 showed that 359,000 acres, some 69 percent, of the county’s 520,000 acres was under grass.⁶⁶ The 1919 report shows that, of the 62,926 acres scheduled for consideration, orders had been issued in respect of 47,779 acres.⁶⁷ The scale of the work of this Committee is emphasised by the number of orders to break-up pasture, as well as the fact that it had inspected 476 farms totalling 98,223 acres. This hugely labour intensive exercise had reduced the county’s pasture from 359,000 to 311,000 acres or 60 percent of the county’s

⁶³ Street, *Farmer’s Glory*, p. 142.

⁶⁴ NRO, ML 3809, minutes of meetings of 20 February 1918 and 30 March 1918. Street recalls that when, on his father’s death, he wanted to take over the farm in 1918, he was quoted a 100 percent increase, see Street, *Farmer’s Glory*, p. 142.

⁶⁵ NRO, ML 3809, minutes of meetings of 27 April 1918 and 25 May 1918.

⁶⁶ Sheail, ‘Land improvement and reclamation’, p. 122.

⁶⁷ NRO, X 4209, county War Agricultural Committee Minutes.

acreage.⁶⁸ These figures should be put into context with figures provided by the Royal Commission of 1895. In 1880, there were 290,500 acres of permanent pasture, 52 percent of the enlarged county farmed area of 559,000 acres, this increasing to 339,000 acres, 60.5 percent, by 1893.⁶⁹ This appears to have increased still further to 70 percent by 1915, with the 69 percent in 1917 possibly reflecting some switch back to arable in the early stages of the war.⁷⁰ In Warwickshire, correspondence records the very detailed examination, field by field, that took place on one farm with, for example, 9.324 acres of a field of 14.324 acres being required to be broken up.⁷¹ However, these small amounts added up to a worthwhile amount. The reluctance of farmers can be seen from a letter dated 24 January 1918 from James Soper, who pointed out that one of the fields suggested was far too ‘hilly and troublesome’ for a tractor to break it up efficiently, but was prepared to yield on the other field suggested.⁷² However, in the diary of Oxfordshire farmer Gibbard for 1918, there was no suggestion that any pasture was broken up for arable either in the spring or autumn of that year.⁷³ Generally at a local level in a typical parish of c. 2000 acres, the average area broken-up would have been of the order of 150 acres which, while not insignificant if it had occurred on a single holding, might have escaped record or comment at local level. Over the country as a whole, over three million acres of grass were ploughed up and put down to crops amid

⁶⁸ Sheail, ‘Land improvement and reclamation’, p. 122. This quotes 61 percent.

⁶⁹ Hunter Pringle, *Royal Commission on Agriculture*, p. 88.

⁷⁰ NRO, X 4209.

⁷¹ WRO, CR 1661/1295/29.

⁷² Pers. comm. John Soper, (3 October 2012). Letter to J. Green, presumably the War Agricultural Committee representative, in respect of Manor Farm at Pattishall in Northamptonshire.

⁷³ Gibbard diaries.

‘much hectic endeavour’, but this ‘led to nothing constructive’, and certainly did not call a permanent halt to the shrinking of the arable areas of the country.⁷⁴

Summary and conclusions for the period 1850 to 1918

The ‘High Farming’ period 1850-1875, also often referred to as the ‘Golden Age’, involved improvements in farming methods which probably only some of the larger and wealthier estates would have been able to afford. In the same period, agricultural rents also rose steeply, before falling back to below their 1850 level by 1895. The increase in rents would have benefited the larger estates, but this may have been offset by the costs of improvements if they had significant in-hand farming. Wages also improved, so the labouring class fared well too.

The period 1875-1896 was a deflationary one with all commodities falling by some 40 percent. Corn prices were not immune and, alongside this, there was an increase in imports, a trend which had started in the 1850s. With lower corn prices, farmers moved away from arable, often out of necessity and without carrying out proper conversion of the land, with arable dropping from 56 to 46 percent as shown in Figure 2.6, page 42. Farm sale prices, which had peaked in 1875, dropped from some £55 per acre to not much above £20 by the turn of the century. With these many adverse factors, farming suffered a long downturn from the late 1870s. until a very modest recovery started in the mid 1890s. The beneficiaries of this were the farmers and labourers, while the landlords’ share of agricultural income fell still further. Coinciding with this came the introduction of death duties, albeit only on the wealthiest of estates, and a decline in landed influence

⁷⁴ Stapledon, *The Land Now and Tomorrow*, p. 60.

in parliament. These changes set the scene from around 1910 for the landed gentry to take the first steps to reduce their estates in favour of other forms of investment.

The modest recovery did not stem the decline in arable farming, until ploughing-up of pasture occurred to a limited extent in the latter part of the war. As a result arable increased from 41 to 45 percent between 1915 and 1920, only to fall back to 41 percent by 1925. The latter years of the war were very profitable for farmers and labourers, but not for landowners, who quickly returned to the saleroom soon after the cessation of hostilities. This became the start of much wider ownership of farms.

In the next chapter studies of farms, which had been bought immediately after the Great War, will show how those farmers who had invested profits built up during the war managed to weather the economic conditions of the early 1920s, while others did not.

Chapter 3

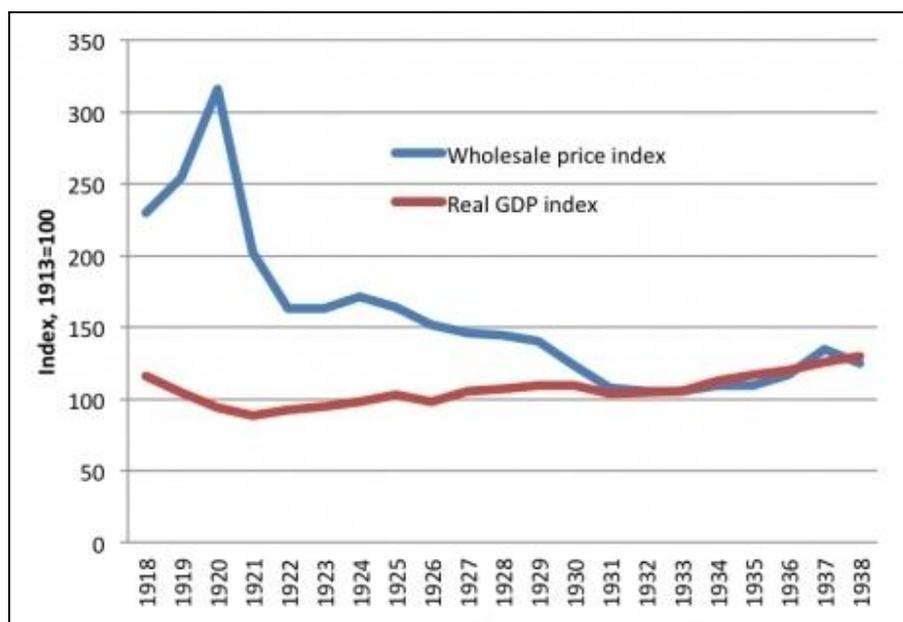
The macro-economics of farming in the interwar period: an overview

In this chapter, the social and macro-economic trends are first examined for the interwar period. Farming trends are then discussed in greater detail drawing on evidence, where appropriate, from some of the studies of individual farms, which follow in the next two chapters. For this, the main branches of farming, arable, fattening cattle, milk and sheep, are considered separately as a prelude to the approach taken in the conclusions of this study. This seeks to identify, more clearly than the general historiography for the period, the trends in these sectors. These will be shown to have performed at times very differently, particularly in the 1930s.

GDP in the UK economy is represented in Figure 3.1, indexed to a base of 100 in 1913.¹ Shown alongside GDP is the wholesale price index. Both demonstrate clearly the lack of economic growth until the mid 1930s, and the long deflationary spiral after the price surge at the end of the war which peaked in 1920. By 1931 the price index was almost back to its 1913 level.

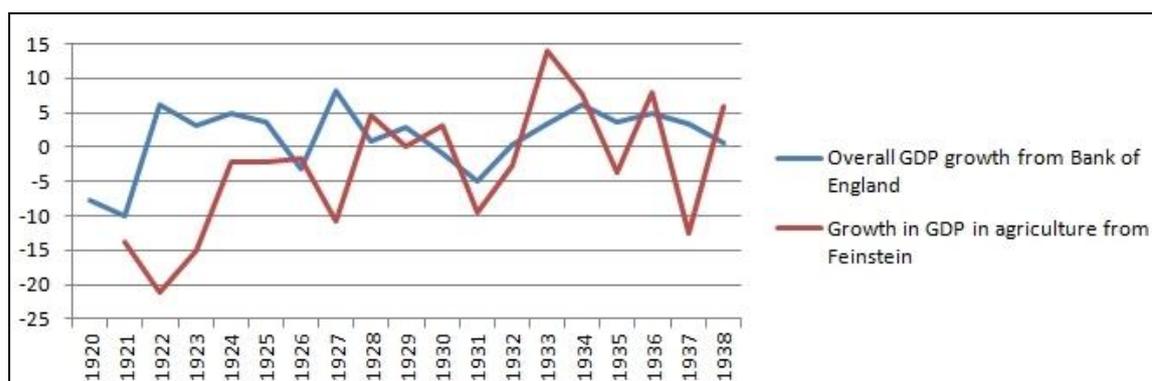
¹ Based on graph at <http://www.economicshelp.org/blog/5948/economics/uk-economy-in-the-1920s/>, sourced from IMF [accessed 27 January 2013]. The Wholesale Price Index correlates with the 'Statist' index from the annual article on wholesale prices in the *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society*, 'Wholesale Prices in 1940', 104, 4 (1941), p. 348, although the table in this source states that the base index of 100 relates to 1867-1877, rather than to 1911-1913.

Figure 3.1: *UK Economy, 1920s and 1930s*



Graphs of the actual, rather than the index, general and agricultural GDP, are shown in Figure 3.2. From 1924 onwards, agricultural GDP followed similar trends to general GDP, but was at a lower level, with the mid-1920s recession in agriculture being one year later in 1927.²

Figure 3.2: *General and agricultural GDP growth, 1921-1938*

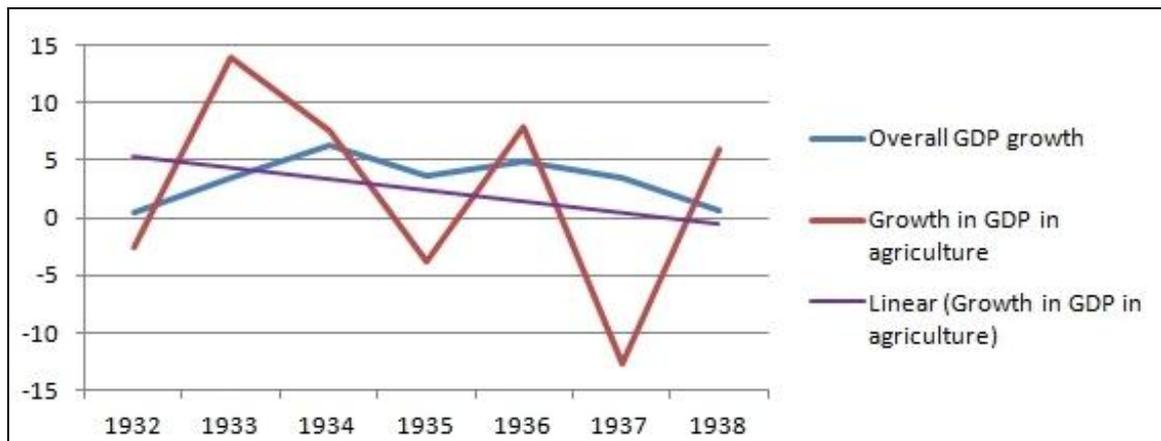


²<http://www.bankofengland.co.uk/publications/Documents/quarterlybulletin/threecenturiesofdata.xls> [accessed 23 May 2014]. C. Feinstein, *Statistical Tables of National Income, Expenditure and Output of the U.K., 1855-1965* (Cambridge, 1976), p. 26. There is no 1919 figure from which to calculate the GDP change in agricultural growth in 1920.

After the severe deflation in 1920, both GDPs were in negative territory in 1921, but then general GDP became positive from 1922, while agricultural GDP remained negative until 1928. The two periods of recession in 1926 (1927 for agriculture) and 1931 are clear from Figure 3.2. The first of these resulted from the reintroduction of the gold standard in 1925, which made the British pound too strong and which harmed exports. The second recession had its roots in 1929 with the Wall Street Crash of that year being one of the influences. Other key causes were a huge budget deficit in 1930-1931 and the knock-on effect of an international banking crisis, which followed the collapse of an Austrian bank in 1931, and impacted on countries within the Gold Standard. The run on Sterling started early in September 1931 resulting in Britain taking the decision to leave the Gold Standard a few weeks later. Countries that took this action sooner, such as Britain, experienced a faster recovery. So, contrary to the folk memory of a disastrous period in the 1930s, the UK probably suffered less than other countries.

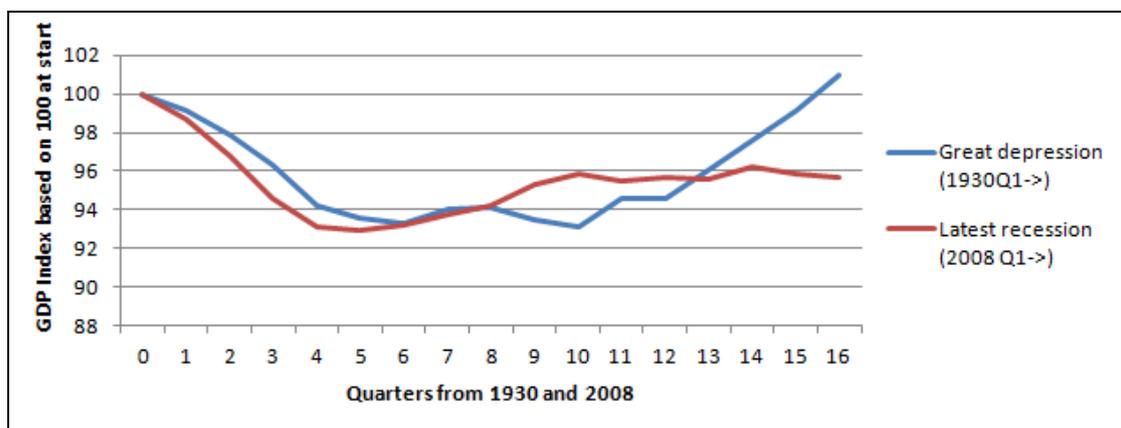
In the 1930s, the GDP position is less clear from Figure 3.2, so a linear trend line for agricultural GDP has been added in Figure 3.3, and this shows a downward trajectory in 1932-1938, while general GDP followed a gentle curve from zero to five percent and then back down to zero at the end of this period. So far as the 1930s are concerned, this decline in agricultural growth is a key indicator for what follows in this thesis.

Figure 3.3: *General and agricultural GDP growth and trends, 1932-1938*



The recession that followed the bank collapse in 2008 has often been referred to as the worst recession since the 1930s. However, data from the Office for National Statistics shows that the fall in GDP was actually more prolonged in the recent 2008-2012 recession than the Great Depression of the 1930s or, to put it another way, Britain got back to growth relatively quickly after 1930, as confirmed by Figure 3.4.³

Figure 3.4: *The 1930 depression compared with the 2008 recession*



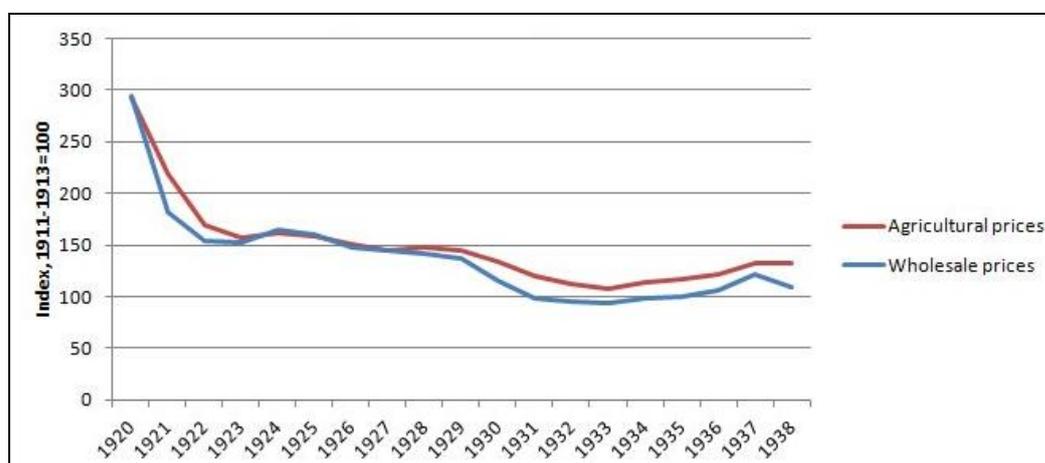
However, in terms of human misery the Great Depression of the 1930s was arguably far greater, with unemployment in the 1930s much higher and without a proper social

³ <http://www.economicshelp.org/blog/5214/economics/great-recession-v-great-depression-of-1930s/> [accessed 23 May 2014]. Office of National Statistics http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/dcp171766_263951.pdf [accessed 23 May 2014].

security net, so that the unemployed faced living on the breadline with only very meagre allowances. Unemployment rose alarmingly through the period 1929-1931, as shown later in Figure 3.15 on page 71, but it peaked in 1932 and fell away gradually thereafter.

As can be seen from Figure 3.5, the decline in prices was a general one with the agricultural index maintaining a dominance over the general index of wholesale prices, a dominance which it had gained soon after the end of the Great War.⁴

Figure 3.5: Comparison of general wholesale and agricultural prices, 1920-1938



It had not been necessary significantly to increase base rates leading up to reintroduction of the gold standard, as the real interest rate was higher than shown due to a generally deflationary situation, as shown by the price index in Figure 3.1, page 62. Bank base rates are shown in Figure 3.6.⁵

⁴ Wholesale Price Index is taken from the 'Statist' index from the annual article on wholesale prices in the *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society*, 'Wholesale Prices in 1940', 104. 4 (1941), p. 348, although the table in this source states that the base index of 100 relates to 1867-1877, rather than to 1911-1913. The Agricultural Price Index is taken from Whetham, *Agrarian History, Volume 8*, p. 230. The figures for 1933-1939 include commodity subsidies, which Whetham states added about 4 points to the index in 1937 and 1938. The Statist index of general wholesale prices mirrors the graph in Figure 3.1.

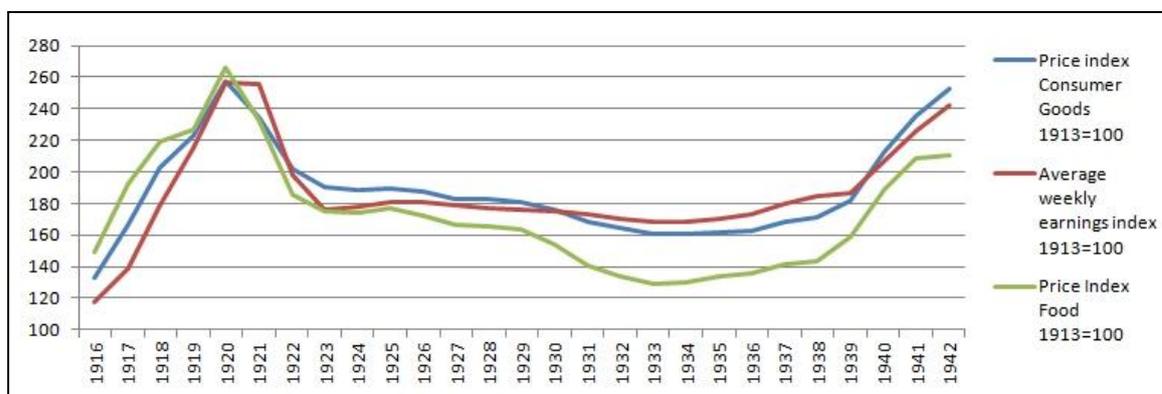
⁵ Graph prepared by author from data in B. Mitchell, *British Historical Statistics* (1988, Cambridge, 1990), p. 682.

Figure 3.6: *Bank base rates, 1919-1938*



This deflationary situation continued after the big fall in prices in 1920-1921, as shown in Figure 3.7, based on Feinstein's work.⁶ Inflation did not become a factor until the mid 1930s, and thus does not play a part throughout most of the period covered by this thesis. This Figure also shows that inflation and wages tracked each other throughout the interwar period but, importantly for agriculture, that the trend of food prices lagged behind the general price index quite significantly after 1921.

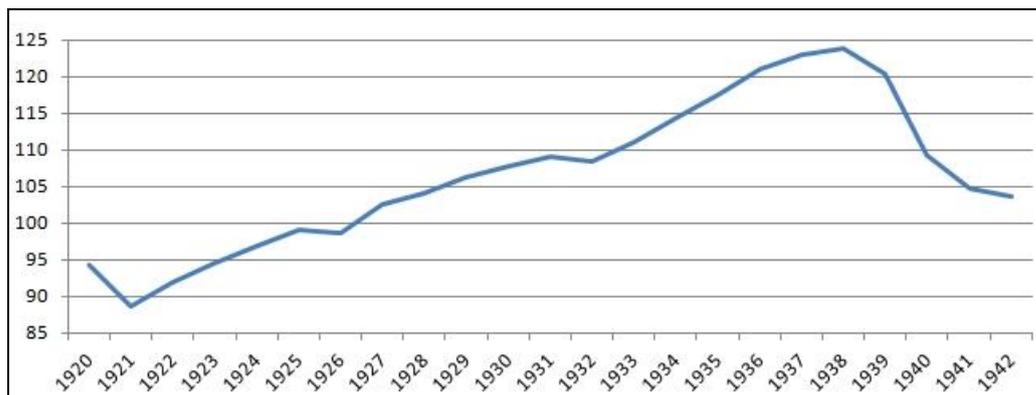
Figure 3.7: *Prices and wages indices, 1916-1942*



⁶ Graph prepared by author from data in Feinstein, *Statistical Tables*, pp. 132, 134, 140.

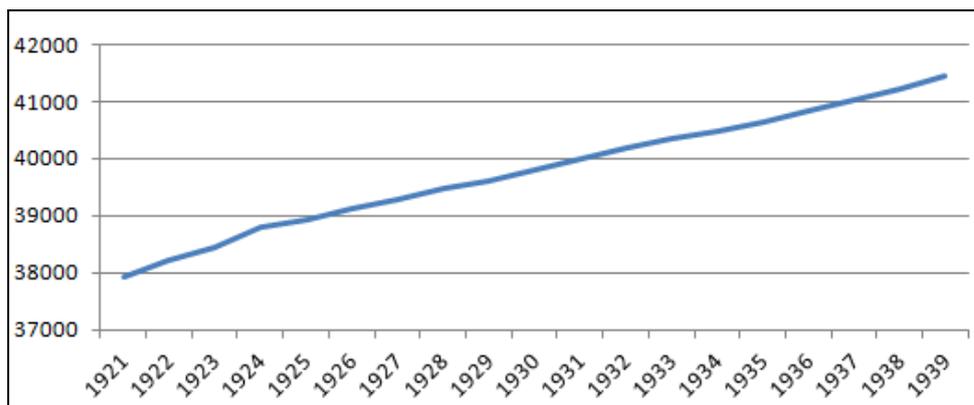
Armstrong found similar changes to those of Feinstein, with the cost of living dropping by 10 percent between 1925 and 1938.⁷ The average weekly earnings index was in gentle decline from 1924 to 1934-1935. The index of consumer expenditure, Figure 3.8, shows that this increased throughout the period.⁸

Figure 3.8: *Index of consumer expenditure at 1913 prices, 1920-1942*



This general increase in consumer expenditure was to be expected with an increasing population, as shown in Figure 3.9.⁹

Figure 3.9: *Population of England and Wales, 1921-1939*



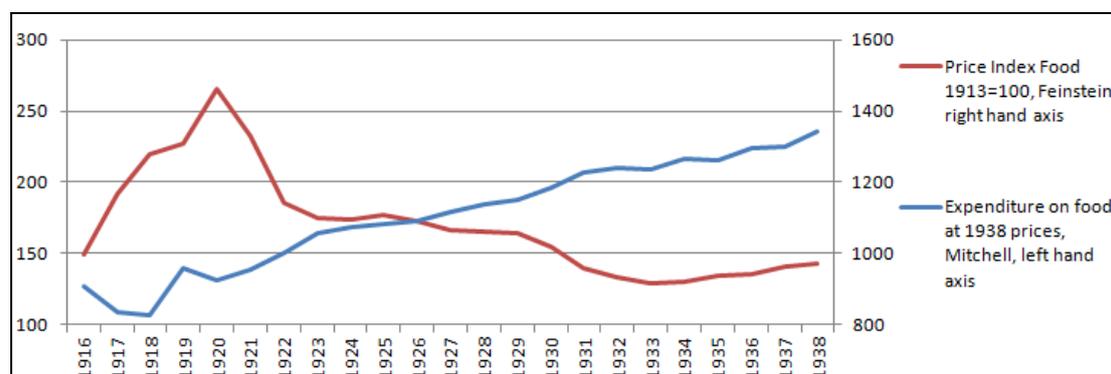
⁷ A. Armstrong, *Farmworkers: A Social and Economic History 1770-1980* (London, 1988), p. 194.

⁸ Graph prepared by author from data in Feinstein, *Statistical Tables*, p. 22.

⁹ Graph prepared by author from data in Mitchell, *Abstract of British Historical Statistics*, p. 10.

However between 1924 and 1938, general consumer expenditure increased at a faster rate than population rising by 28 percent whereas population rose only by 6.2 percent. Figure 3.10 shows that expenditure on food (at 1938 prices) rose by 34.2 percent from 1924-1938, faster than the food price index, and at a greater rate than the 6.2 percent increase in population.¹⁰ This was due to a better diet, with reduction in bread consumption, and an increase in the quantity of food consumed.¹¹ This was against a background of an increase in disposable income with food expenditure increasing, although declining as a proportion of the average family's budget. This willingness to spend more on food is probably the key to the increase in meat prices in the second half of the 1930s, which is discussed in Chapter 5.

Figure 3.10: *Food price index and expenditure statistics, 1916-1938*



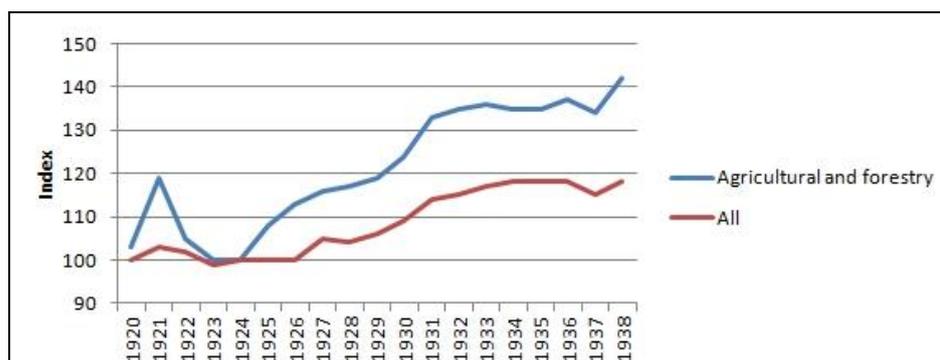
This increase in disposable income, with inflation almost absent, translated into a real income increase as shown by Mitchell and Deane's work in Figure 3.11.¹²

¹⁰ Graph prepared by author. Expenditure on food at 1938 prices from Mitchell, *Abstract of British Historical Statistics*, pp. 371-372. Price index of food from Feinstein, *Statistical Tables*, p. 134. Percentages are extrapolated from data in these sources quoted. The starting date of 1924 is chosen rather than 1921 when prices had dropped significantly due to the rapid deflation. They had recovered a little by 1924.

¹¹ Hammond, 'British food supplies', p.5. <http://www.blacksacademy.net/content/3158.html> [accessed 3 March 2015].

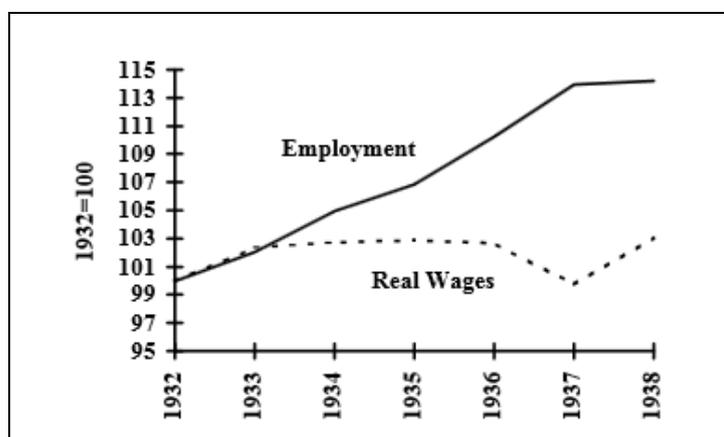
¹² Graph prepared by author from data in Mitchell, *Abstract of British Historical Statistics*, pp. 351-353.

Figure 3.11: *Agricultural income data, England and Wales, 1920-1938*



In real terms and as a consequence of the labourer's strike which started in Norfolk in 1923, agricultural incomes increased after 1924, with an increase of 31 percent from 1925-1938, but with most of this increase taking place between 1925 and 1933, and virtually no change from 1933 onwards.¹³ The latter is broadly in line with the all-wage trend shown for this latter period by Butchart's work in Figure 3.12.¹⁴

Figure 3.12: *Real wages, per Butchart, 1932-1938*

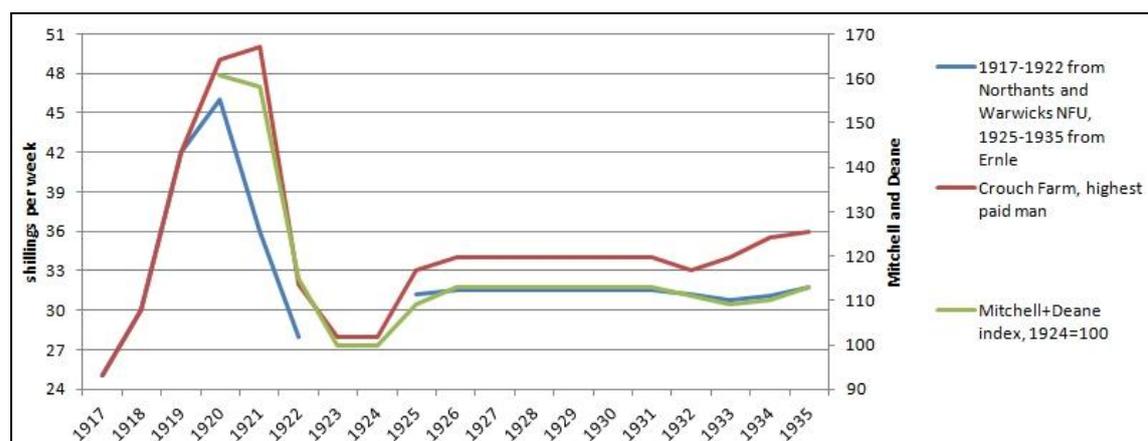


¹³ Mitchell, *Abstract of British Historical Statistics*, pp. 351-352. Figures from 1917-1922 are derived from the Minute books of the Northants and Warwicks branches of the NFU. Figures from 1925-1935 are from Lord Ernle, *English Farming Past and Present* (London, 1961), p. 527. In the same period Armstrong had different figures showing the cost of living dropping by 10 percent, and real wages of agricultural workers rising by 20 percent, see Armstrong, *Farmworkers*, p. 194.

¹⁴ Graph prepared by author from data in E. Butchart, 'Unemployment and non-employment in interwar Britain', *Discussion Papers in Economic and Social History*, 16 (Oxford, 1997), pp. 12-18.

While the real value of agricultural incomes rose in the second half of the 1920s, as shown in Figure 3.11, agricultural wage rates rose significantly over a short period after 1924 and up to 1926 as shown in Figure 3.13, derived from NFU minutes and Lord Ernle.¹⁵ Thereafter money income stayed flat between 1926 and 1935-1936.

Figure 3.13: *Agricultural wage rates from other sources, 1917-1935*



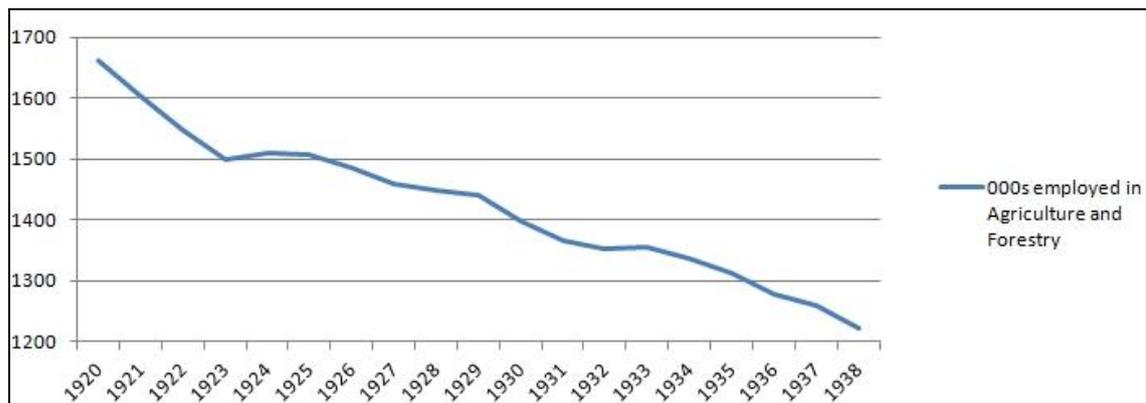
Numbers employed in agriculture in Figure 3.14 show this to have been in considerable decline over the interwar period.¹⁶ This was due, in part, to the relative unattractiveness of agricultural employment. For example, in 1937, the average weekly wage of unskilled agricultural workers was 33/7d while in other trades this was between 47s and 54s, with skilled workers earning from 66s upwards.¹⁷

¹⁵ Graph prepared by author. Figures from 1917-1922 are derived from the Minute books of the Northants and Warwickshire branches of the NFU. Figures from 1925-1935 are from Ernle, *English Farming*, p. 527.

¹⁶ Graph prepared by author from data in Feinstein, *Statistical Tables*, p. 129.

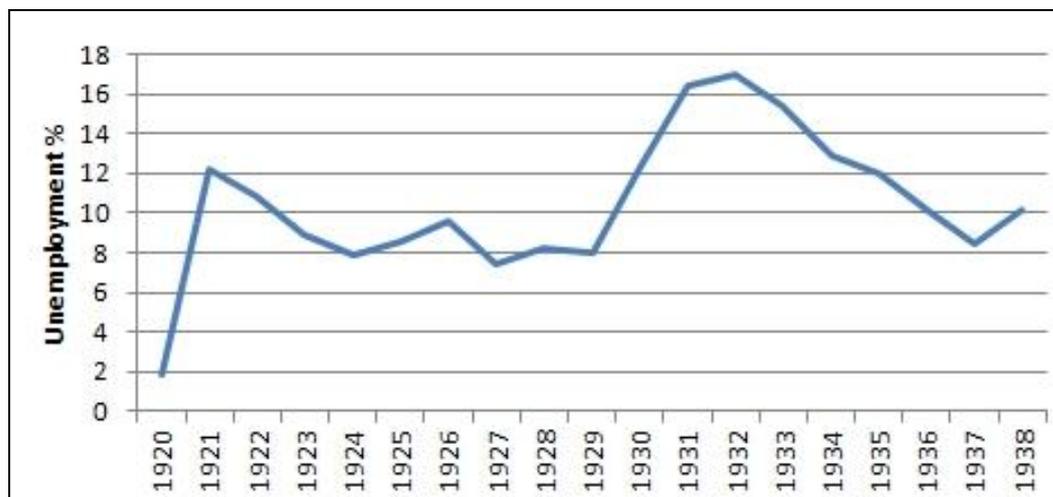
¹⁷ Armstrong, *Farmworkers*, p. 195.

Figure 3.14: *Numbers employed in agriculture, 1920-1938*



Unemployment in the UK more than doubled at the start of the 1930s, as can be seen from Figure 3.15, due to the decrease in American orders and the general disorganisation of world markets.¹⁸

Figure 3.15: *UK unemployment 1920s and 1930s*



Butchart considered that there was a fallacy within the unemployment figures.¹⁹ His interpretation of the official figures was that in the 1920s, and as shown in Figure 3.16,

¹⁸ Graves *et al*, *The Long Week-End; A Social History of Great Britain 1918-1939* (1940, London, 1985), p. 248. P. Dewey, *War and Progress: Britain 1914-1945* (Harlow, 1997), p. 227. The graph is based on figures in W. Garside, *British Unemployment 1919-1939: A Study in Public Policy* (Cambridge, 1990), p. 5, <http://assets.cambridge.org/97805213/64430/sample/9780521364430ws.pdf> [accessed 27 January 2013].

these figures did not include those who chose not to work, ‘a second army of jobless individuals during the interwar period hidden in the home rather than loafing on street corners’.

Figure 3.16: *Butchart’s chart showing non-employment compared with unemployment*



He postulated that, with the workforce estimated to have increased by 1.4m between 1932-1938, it was this increase in the supply of labour as the economy recovered that meant that unemployment remained persistently high over the course of the 1930s. He inferred that the fruits of economic recovery in the 1930s did not feed through to wages, a view shared by Dimsdale and others.²⁰ So, the farmer’s complaint that, in the early 1930s, ‘wages were 75 percent higher than in 1914, while prices, on balance, were only

¹⁹ Graph prepared by author from data in Butchart, ‘Unemployment and non-employment’, pp. 12-18.

²⁰ N. Dimsdale *et al*, ‘Real wages and unemployment during the 1930s’, *The Economic Journal*, 99 (1989), pp. 271-292.

10 percent higher' cannot be attributed to money incomes from this period.²¹ In real terms, wages rose in the 1920s but not the 1930s.

Farming trends

As a backcloth to the interwar period, the comparison of changes in food production and other statistics since about 1880, comparing Britain with other Western European countries, is shown in Table 3.1.²² It shows that British agriculture had become one of the least intensive in the 1930s, whereas it had been one of the most intensive in the second half of the nineteenth century.²³ Overall agricultural output in the 1930s was very little higher than in mid-Victorian times, and the arable sector was substantially lower.

Table 3.1: *Farming output comparisons between Britain and Western Europe*

	Changes in food production % c.1880-1930		No. of livestock per 100 acres 1937	Net output per acre 1937	% arable 1930
	Cereals	No. of livestock	£	£	£
Britain	-26	+11	30	6	34
Denmark	+60	+134	53	10	83
Netherlands	+39	+74	55	14	42
Switzerland	(+)	+43	61	15	13
Germany	+44	+19	36	8	68
Belgium	+29	+27	47	14	60
France	-5	+19	24	8	58

²¹ Armstrong, *Farmworkers*, p. 194.

²² P. Yates, *Food Production in Western Europe* (London, 1940), pp. 514, 518-520.

²³ E. J. T. Collins, 'Agriculture and conservation in England; an overview 1880-1939', *Journal of the Royal Agricultural Society of England*, 146 (1985), p. 38.

Arable and pasture

The trend of declining arable, and increasing pasture for Great Britain is shown in Figures 3.17.²⁴ This covers the period 1914-1942 to emphasise the two wartime ploughing-up campaigns and shows that the one in the Great War had relatively little effect compared with what happened in the Second World War. The Figure also shows the ‘crossovers’ that occurred on these two occasions.

Figure 3.17: *Trends of permanent grass and arable in Great Britain, 1914-1942*

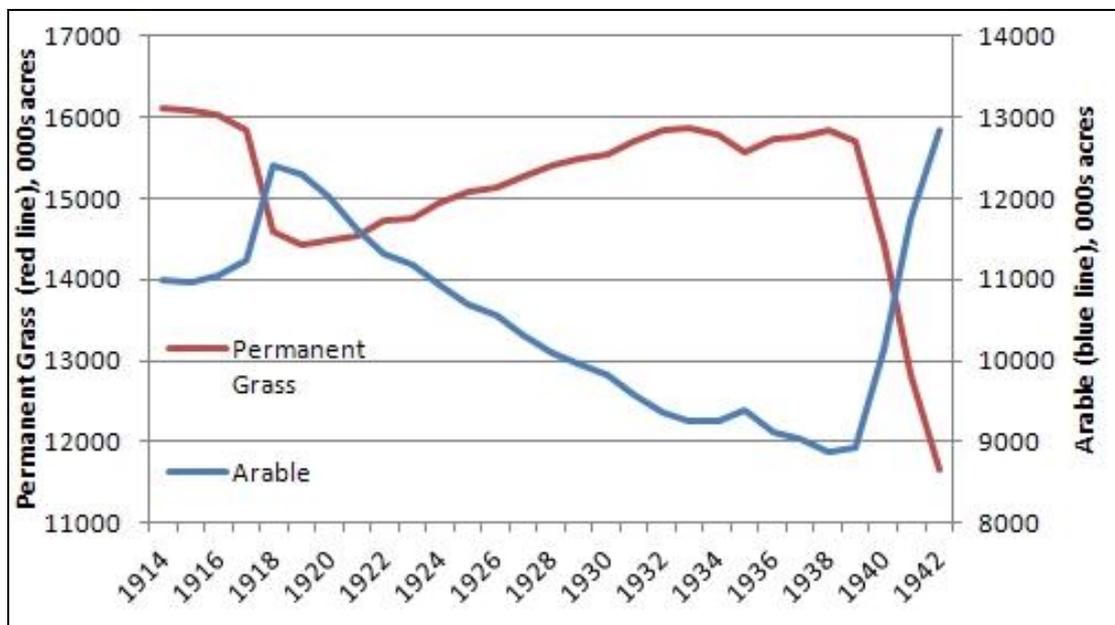


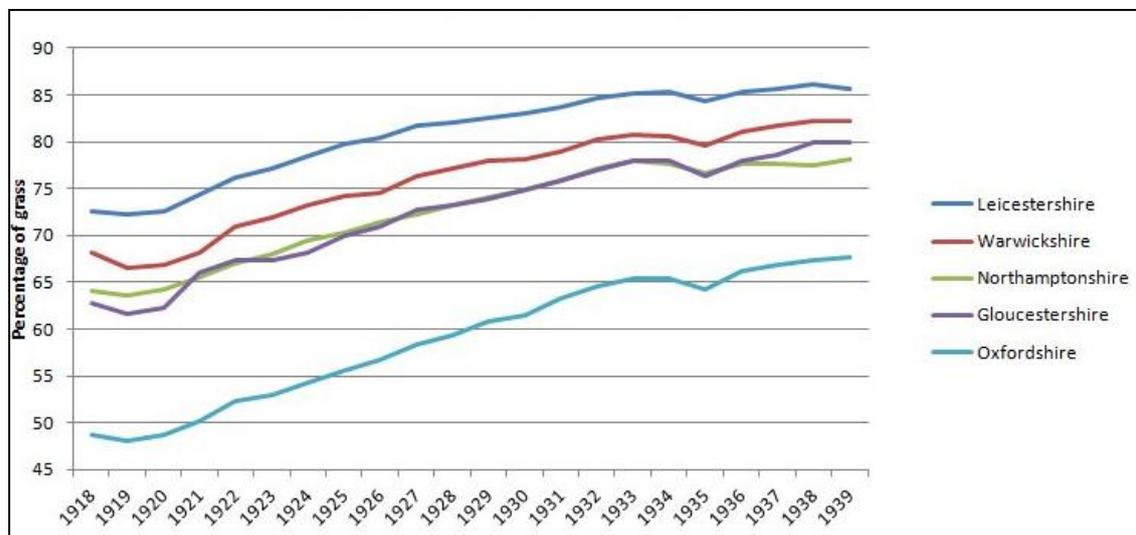
Figure 3.18 shows, for the period of this study, the percentage of grass for the five main counties of the study area in this thesis.²⁵ These surveys were collected by the then Board of Agriculture (replaced in 1919 by the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries), and were based on the Returns from individual farms as at 4 June, albeit the details of the

²⁴ Graphs prepared by author from MAFF, *A Century of Agricultural Statistics*, pp. 94-102. It should be noted that the pasture acreage did not get back to the 1914 level, but urbanisation had reduced the total available farming area so this is not surprising.

²⁵ Graph prepared by the author from the individual annual statistics for the period of the graph from MAF, *Agricultural Statistics: Report on the Agricultural Returns Relating to Acreage and Produce of Crops and Number of Livestock in Great Britain* (HMSO).

individual holdings are no longer extant, with the information being held by parish total only.²⁶ The first point on the graph represents the position just before war came to an end. There is a very strong correlation between the national trend of permanent grass, shown by the red line in Figure 3.17, and these county trends. The dip in 1919-1920 shows the government's ploughing-up policy being played out, and the dip in 1935 is a consequence of the Wheat Act of 1932 persuading some farmers back to arable.

Figure 3.18: *Percentage of grass in five counties, 1918-1939*

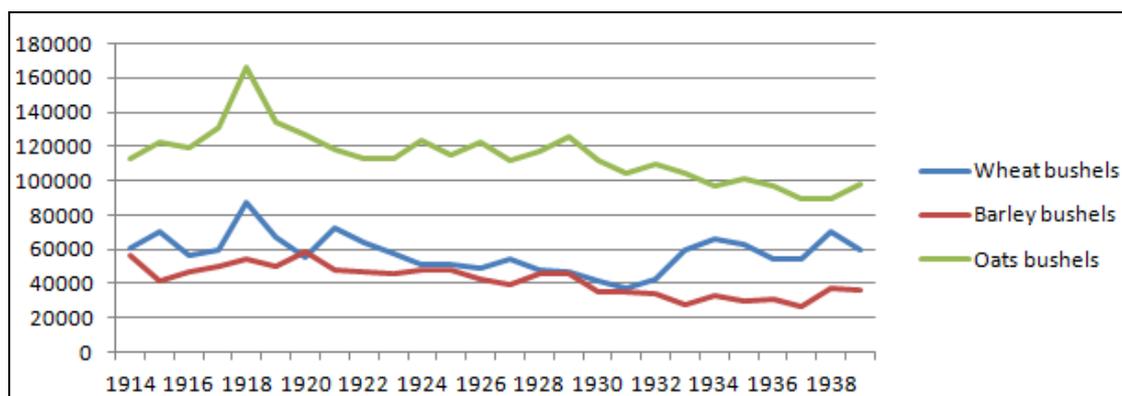


Output of the three main arable crops is shown in Figure 3.19, with wheat the main loser, until the 1932 Wheat Act came into force.²⁷

²⁶ This has been confirmed by TNA in correspondence and also by inspection of a record for Brampton Ash for 4 June 1921 as referred to later in this paper on pages 190-195.

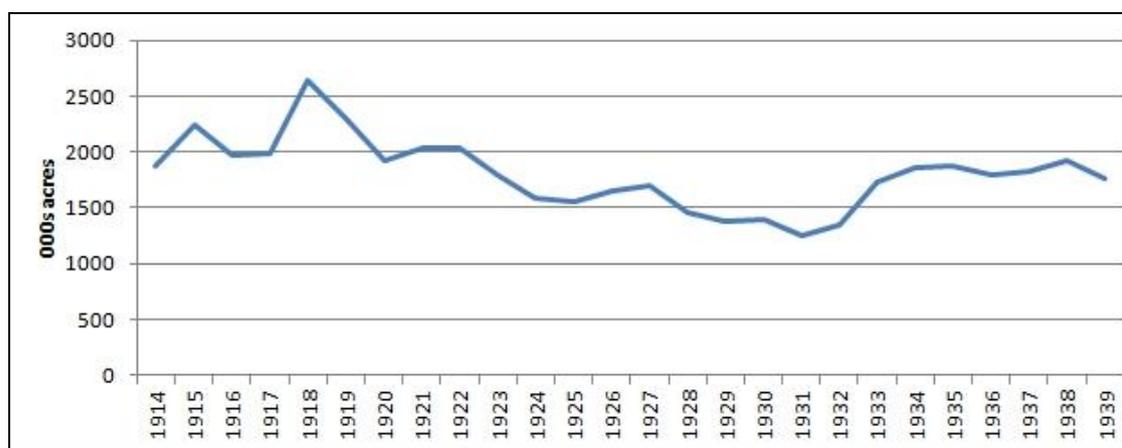
²⁷ Graph prepared by author from data in B. Mitchell *et al*, *Abstract of British Historical Statistics*, (Cambridge, 1962), p. 87.

Figure 3.19: *Output of the three main corn crops in Great Britain, 1914-1939*



The national trend in wheat acreage is shown in Figure 3.20. There was a temporary upsurge in 1927; and then an increase from 1933 onwards as a consequence of the Wheat Act of 1932.

Figure 3.20: *Wheat acreage in Great Britain, 1914-1939*

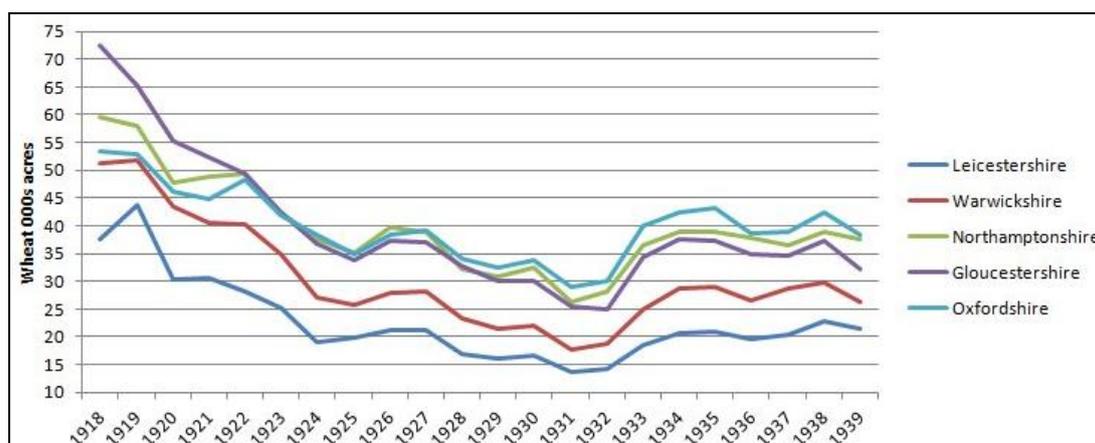


The national trend is reflected in the five-county statistics shown in Figure 3.21 and, again, confirms that these followed national trends.²⁸ The reversal of the downtrend in wheat production after 1932, was partly at the expense of barley.²⁹

²⁸ Graphs of the national trends prepared by the author from data in Mitchell, *Abstract*, pp. 78-79, 87, and for the five counties from the individual annual statistics for the period of the graph from MAF, *Agricultural statistics: Report on the Agricultural Returns*.

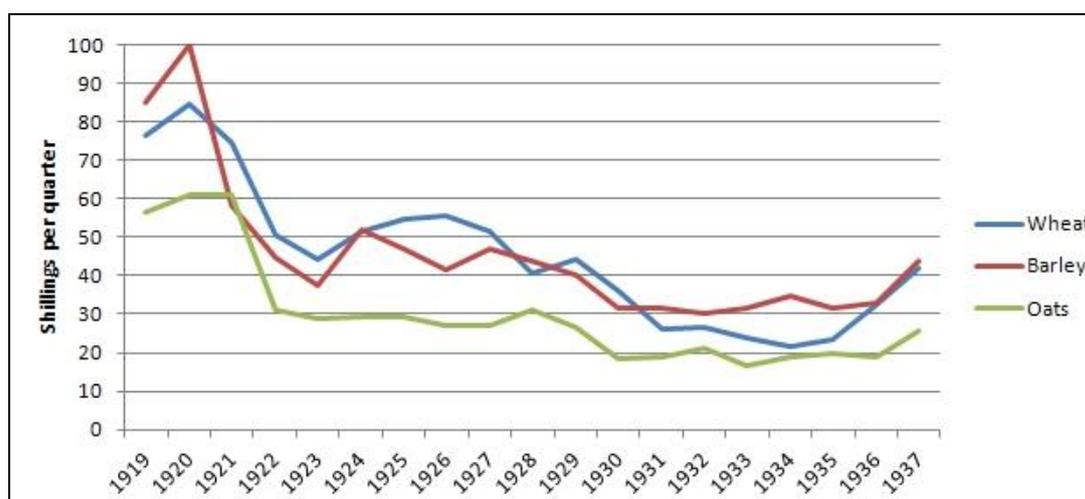
²⁹ A. Plummer, 'The British Wheat Act, 1932', *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 47, 1 (1932), pp. 63-77. A. Cooper, *British Agricultural Policy, 1912-1936* (Manchester, 1989), p. 146. Hammond, *British food supplies*, pp. 9-10.

Figure 3.21: *Percentage of wheat in five counties, 1918-1939*



Corn prices, derived from MAF figures, are shown in Figures 3.22 for the period 1919-1920 to 1937 which shows recovery in this sector from the mid 1930s.³⁰

Figure 3.22: *Annual average prices of wheat, barley and oats, 1919-1937*

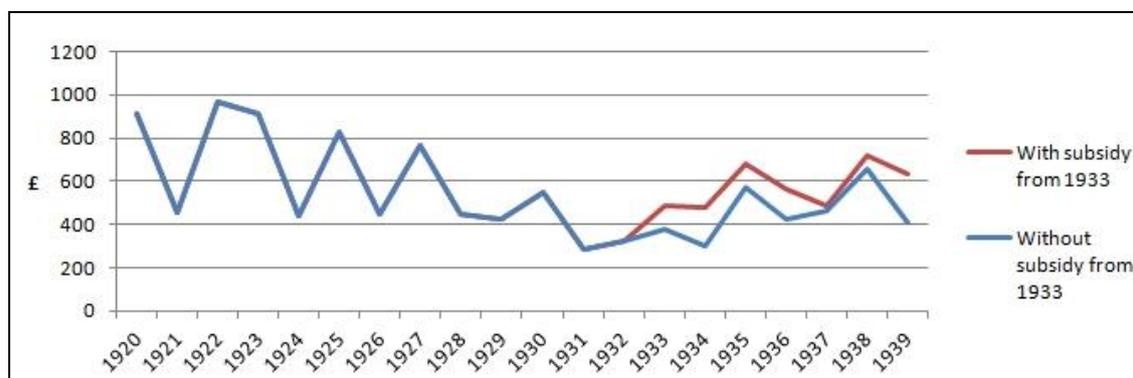


The study of individual farms might have been hoped to confirm trends shown by the national statistics. While all the farms studied were mixed to one degree or another, their source figures were not sufficiently detailed, with the exception of Crouch Farm in Oxfordshire, to show such trends for the different branches of farming. The gross surplus

³⁰ Graph prepared by author from the individual annual statistics for the period of the graph from MAF, *Agricultural Statistics: Report on the Agricultural Returns*. When sourcing the figures, it appeared that there was inconsistency in 1937 onwards from previous years' figures, so the pattern of prices after 1937 needed to be deduced from elsewhere.

of this farm's arable operations is shown in Figure 3.23.³¹ As can be seen, this surplus was in continuing decline until 1932, when the wheat subsidy provided some, but not very significant, improvement in the fortunes of arable farming.³² The broad shape of the graph in Figure 3.23 is in line with the general price trends shown in Figure 3.22, and the trends of outputs of corn crops shown earlier in Figures 3.19, 3.20 and 3.21.

Figure 3.23: *Gross surplus of arable operations at Crouch Farm, 1920-1939*



Livestock

Before examining the individual trends and fortunes of cattle and sheep, Figure 3.24 shows the numbers of these in England and Wales over the extended period 1914-1942.³³ While the trend lines are similar, sheep came into preponderance, at the expense of cattle numbers, from 1926-1932, but then declined in relative terms.

³¹ Gibbard diaries.

³² Graph prepared by author from analysis of the records of this farm.

³³ Graph prepared by author from MAFF, *A Century of Agricultural Statistics*, pp. 94-102.

Figure 3.24: Trends of sheep and cattle, England and Wales, 1914-1942

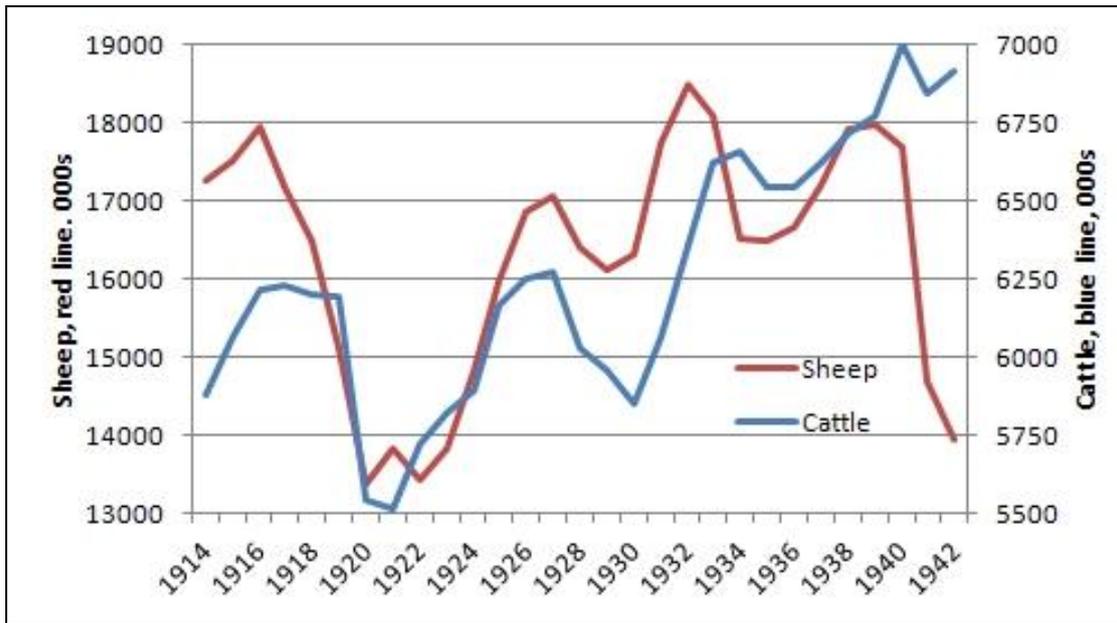
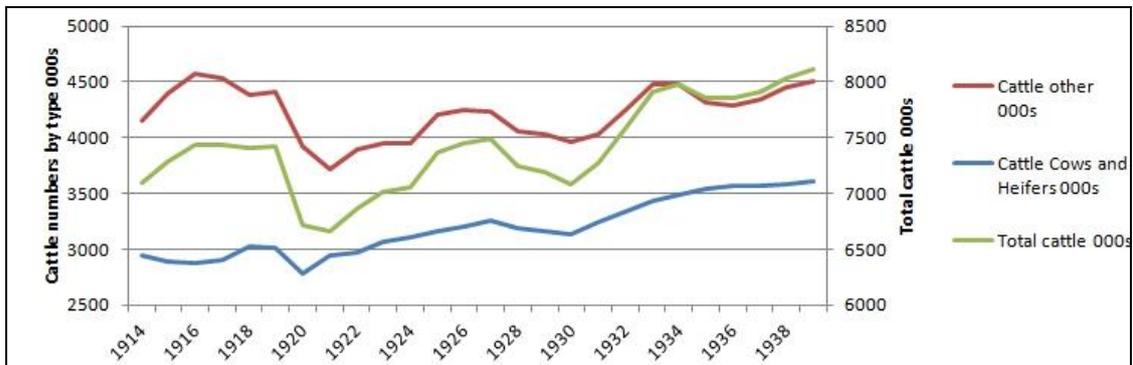


Figure 3.25 shows declines in cattle for fattening in 1921 and 1930, both periods of economic stress.³⁴ Then cattle numbers surged ahead. It also shows the increase in dairying, with the blue line in the graph showing an uptrend throughout the interwar period after 1921. The five-county trends, Figure 3.26, are seen to follow the same pattern.³⁵

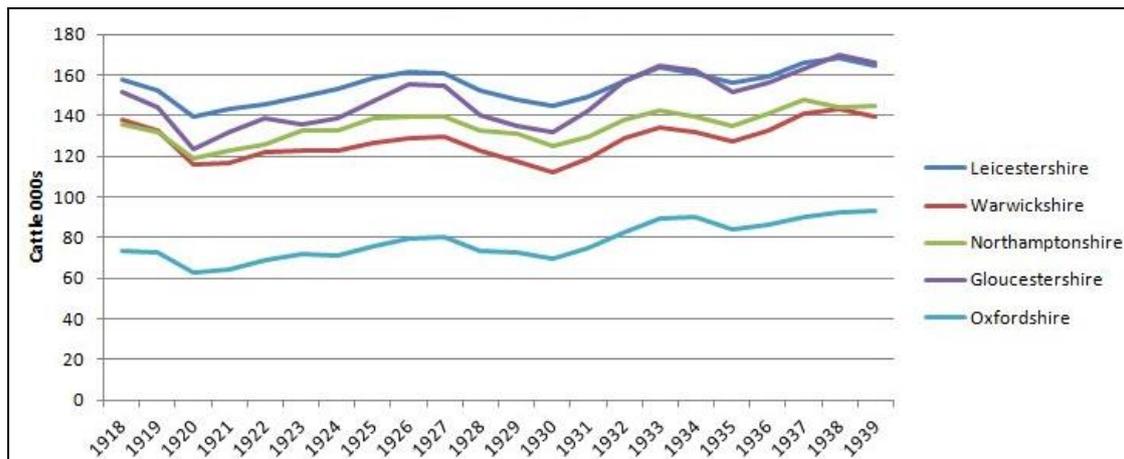
Figure 3.25: Number of cattle in Great Britain, 1914-1939



³⁴ Graph prepared by author from data in Mitchell, *Abstract*, p. 83. The figures for 'total cattle' are the addition of the other two figures.

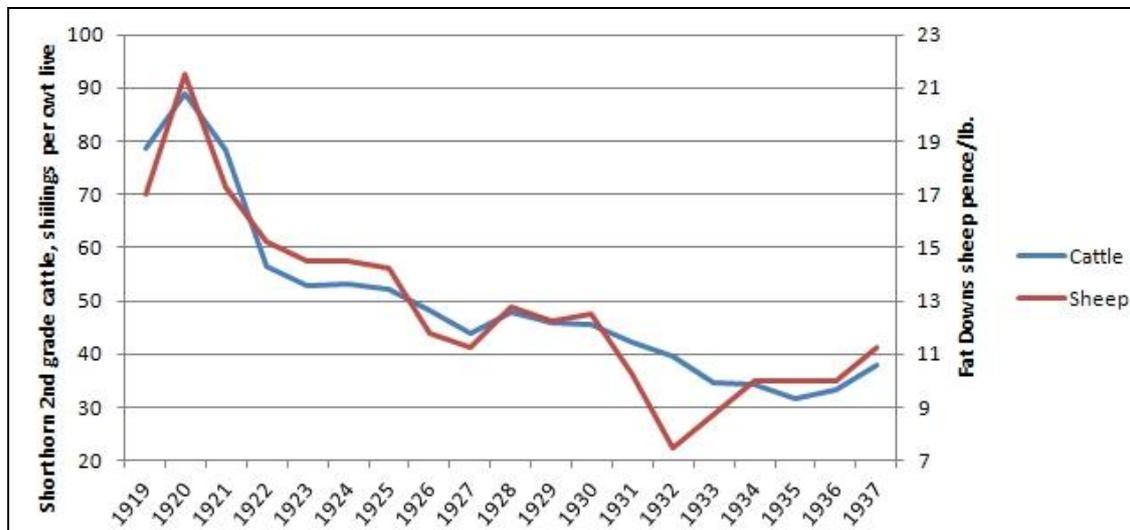
³⁵ Graph prepared by author from the individual annual statistics for the period of the graph from MAF, *Agricultural Statistics: Report on the Agricultural Returns*.

Figure 3.26: *Number of cattle in five counties, 1914-1939*



The annual average livestock price, derived from MAF figures, is shown in Figure 3.27 for the period 1919 to 1937 and, as the graphs show, recovery in cattle farming started in the mid 1930s.³⁶

Figure 3.27: *Annual average price of livestock, 1919-1937*



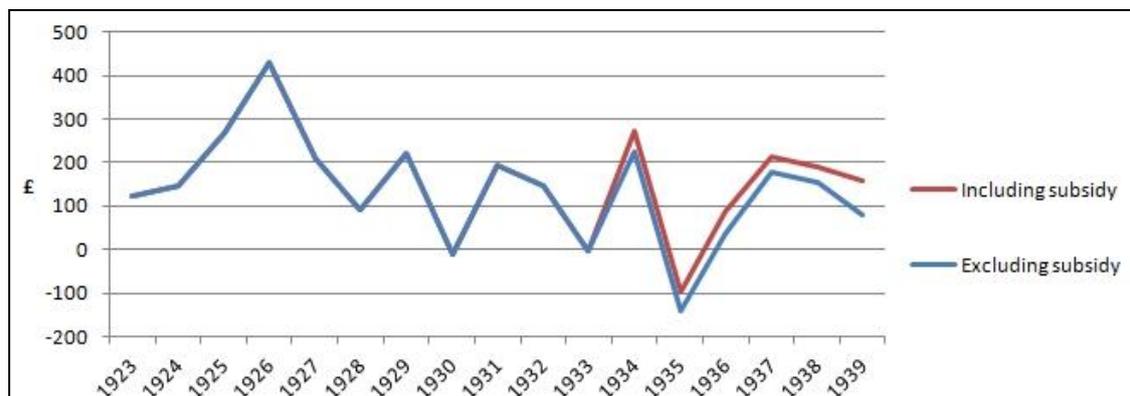
The increase in the cattle price after 1935 appears to be a paradox for, as discussed later on page 265, beef consumption was giving way to lamb and mutton. So, it appears that,

³⁶ Graph prepared by author from the individual annual statistics for the period of the graph from MAF, *Agricultural Statistics: Report on the Agricultural Returns*. The cattle figures relate to second quality shorthorns, and the sheep to 'downs' sheep. The same inconsistency in the source figures was noted after 1937 as footnoted earlier.

with people being prepared to spend more on food as is shown in Figure 3.10, and with unemployment falling as shown in Figure 3.15, the market was able to stand an increase in the price of beef.

Little can be gleaned about the profitability of cattle operations from Figure 3.27, and this is explored on individual farms in the next two chapters. However, as with arable, it was possible to derive the gross surplus of these operations for Crouch Farm, and this is shown for the period 1923-1939 in Figure 3.28.³⁷ This gross surplus is derived from sale proceeds less cost of buying in stock. The earlier years are omitted because of the distortions caused by Gibbard selling down his stock during the period of deflation, as discussed later, page 161. This graph shows that the cattle business improved between 1925 and 1927, and this was probably the basis of the mid-decade upturn seen in a number of the individual studies. Not much can be read into the figures for the 1930s, with the big fluctuations between 1934 and 1937 probably resulting from the fact that Gibbard's figures were not adjusted for year-end stock.

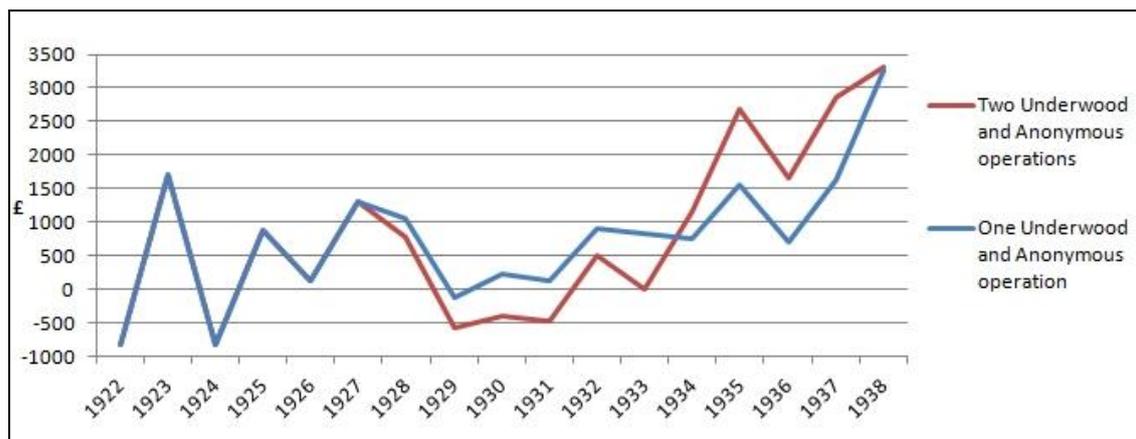
Figure 3.28: *Gross surplus of cattle operations at Crouch Farm, 1923-1939*



³⁷ Gibbard diaries.

However, the trends in the 1930s can be evidenced by the study in the next two chapters of three ‘simple’ cattle-fattening operations in Long Buckby, with their profits from 1922-1938 being shown in Figure 3.29.³⁸ This shows that this business did well in the middle of the 1920s; became marginal from 1929-1933; but then moved ahead strongly. The combined profit of the three operations was adversely affected by the start up of son Charles Underwood’s operation in 1928, the figures for this being included in the red line. This shows, on the limited evidence, that simple cattle fattening survived the falling price. This is explored in more detail in the next two chapters.

Figure 3.29: *Combined profits of Long Buckby cattle-fattening operations, 1922-1938*



Milk

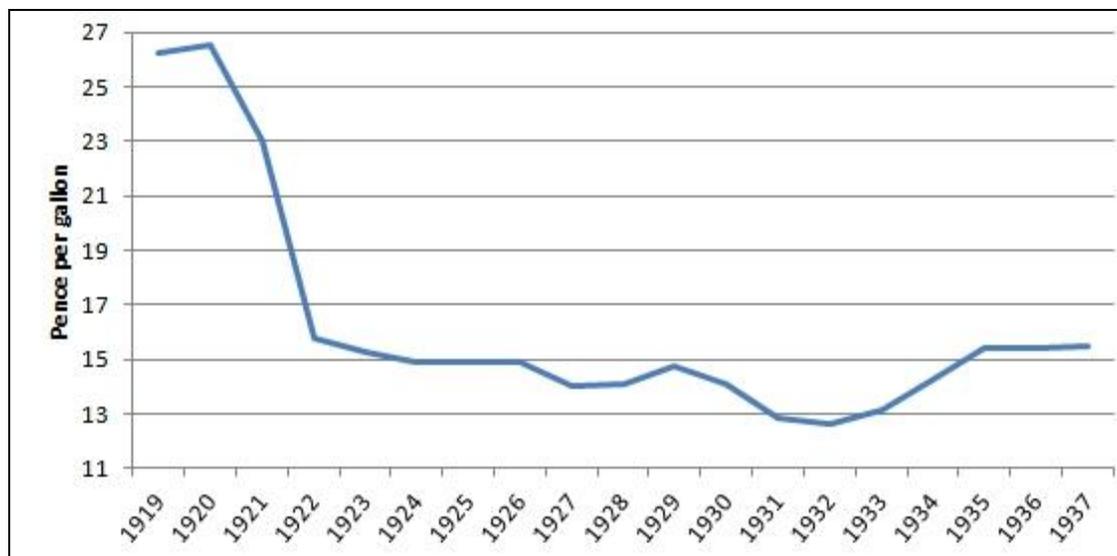
After the fall in the price of milk after the Great War this had stayed relatively stable until 1930, as shown in Figure 3.30.³⁹ This is in contrast to the huge volume of discussion given to this subject by the Northamptonshire branch of the NFU and others throughout the 1920s, as will be seen later in Chapters 4 and 5. However, it seems that the nation’s

³⁸ Graph prepared by author from records of these farming operations.

³⁹ Graph prepared by author from the individual annual statistics for the period of the graph from MAF, *Agricultural Statistics: Report on the Agricultural Returns*.

‘pinta’ was a very emotive topic. The fall in 1931 and 1932 is dealt with later in Chapter 5, page 241, and was the precursor to the establishment of the Milk Marketing Board in 1933. However, the prices from 1934 onwards are very misleading, as they do not take into account the transport costs and maybe also the ‘pool’ deduction payable to the Milk Marketing Board, as further discussed in Chapter 5, page 242. Insufficient data were available from the few cases studied to identify any trend from dairying operations.

Figure 3.30: *Milk price, 1919-1937*

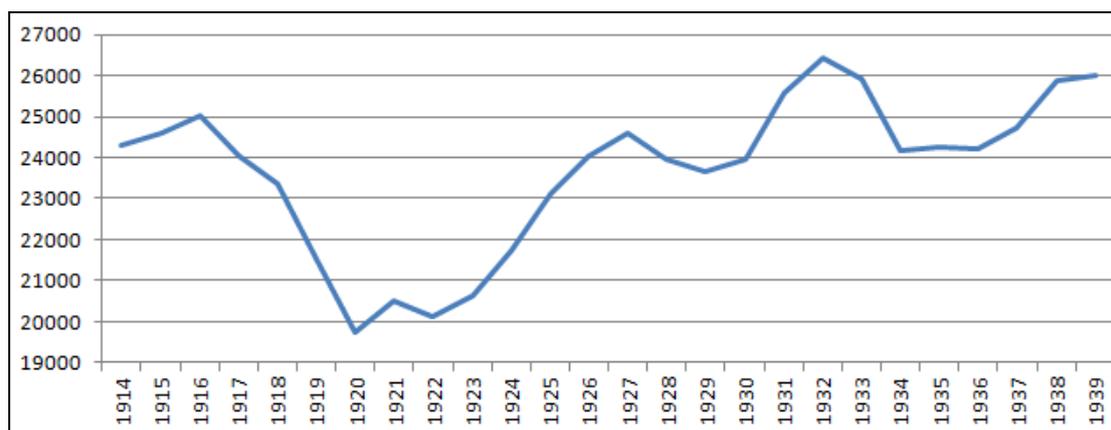


Sheep

The graph showing the number of sheep, Figure 3.31, has three very similar dips to that for cattle shown in Figure 3.25, but a much more marked drop than cattle from 1934-1937.⁴⁰ However, the general trend of increasing sheep numbers after 1923 is likely to have been related to the decline in corn prices. The subsequent decline in sheep numbers, from 1934 onwards, is explained in the next chapter, pages 242-243.

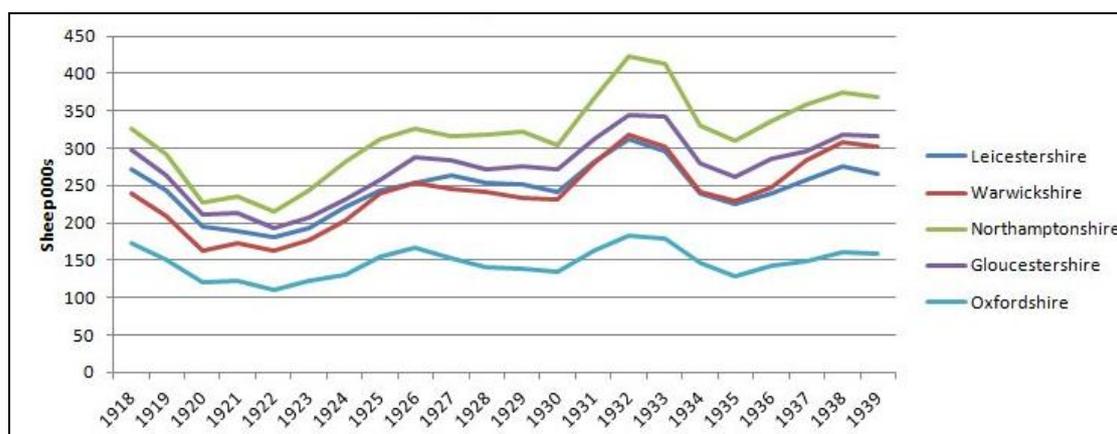
⁴⁰ Graph prepared by author from data in Mitchell, *Abstract*, p. 83.

Figure 3.31: *Number of sheep in Great Britain, 1914-1939*



The trends are, yet again, shown to be representative in the five main counties of the study area, shown in Figure 3.32.⁴¹

Figure 3.32: *Sheep numbers in five counties, 1918-1939*

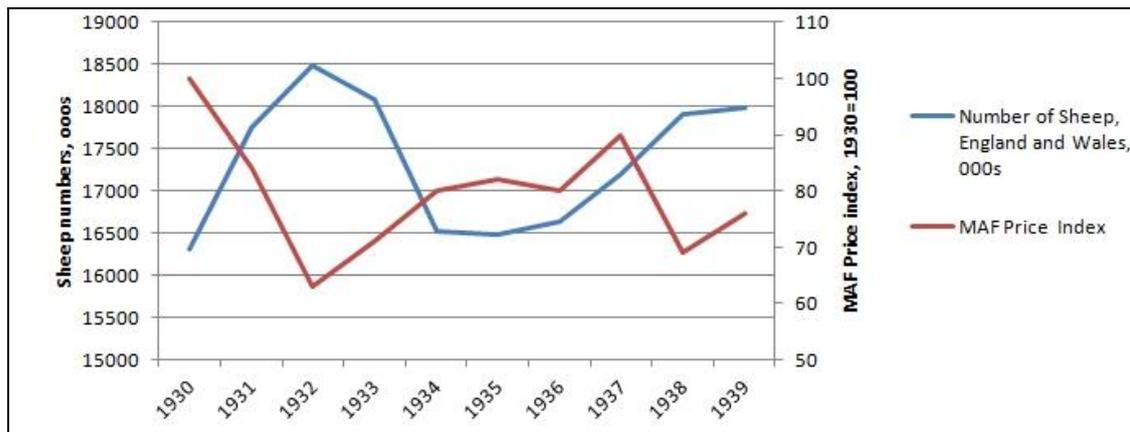


One suggestion for the sheep price movement in the 1930s was that this may have been a product of supply and demand, as shown in Figure 3.33, with the price falling with the higher flock numbers in 1932, rising as numbers were reduced from 1934-1937, and falling again with the increase in flocks from 1938.⁴²

⁴¹ Graphs prepared by author from the individual annual statistics for the period of the graph from *Agricultural Statistics: Report on the Agricultural Returns*.

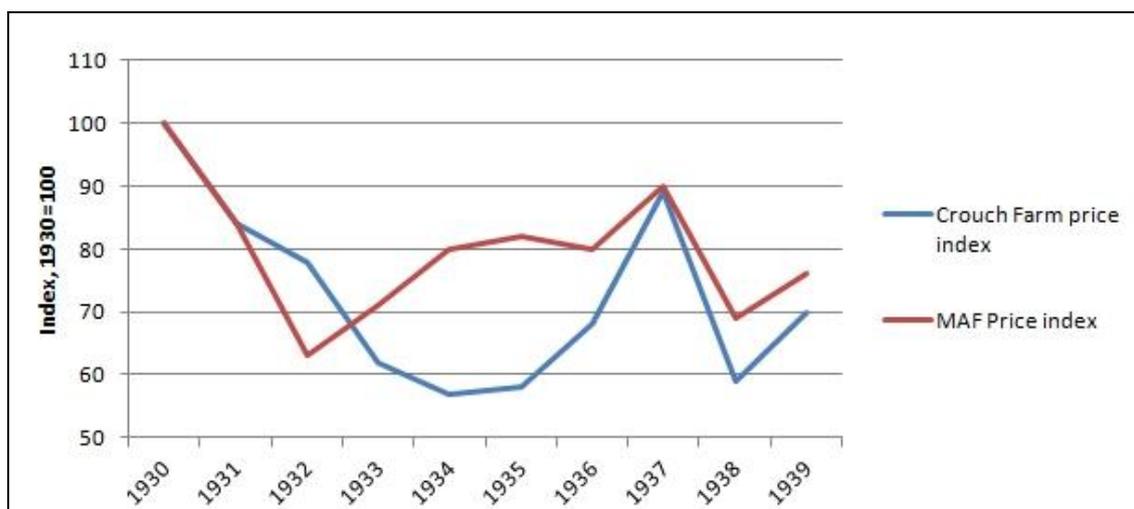
⁴² Graph prepared by author from MAF, *Agricultural Statistics (1939), Vol. 74, Part 1, Acreage and Production of Crops, Number of Livestock and of Agricultural Workers, and Output and Prices of Agricultural Produce in England and Wales* (HMSO), p. 95.

Figure 3.33: *Sheep numbers and price index, 1930-1939*



However the very detailed records held by Gibbard at Crouch Farm show a different experience in the index of sheep selling prices to that shown by the MAF Index. The same red line in Figure 3.33 is represented again in Figure 3.34, with the blue line showing that Gibbard experienced lower prices through to 1935, and that the upturn shown by the MAF index in 1934, did not come his way until 1936. From 1937, the two indices follow similar paths.⁴³

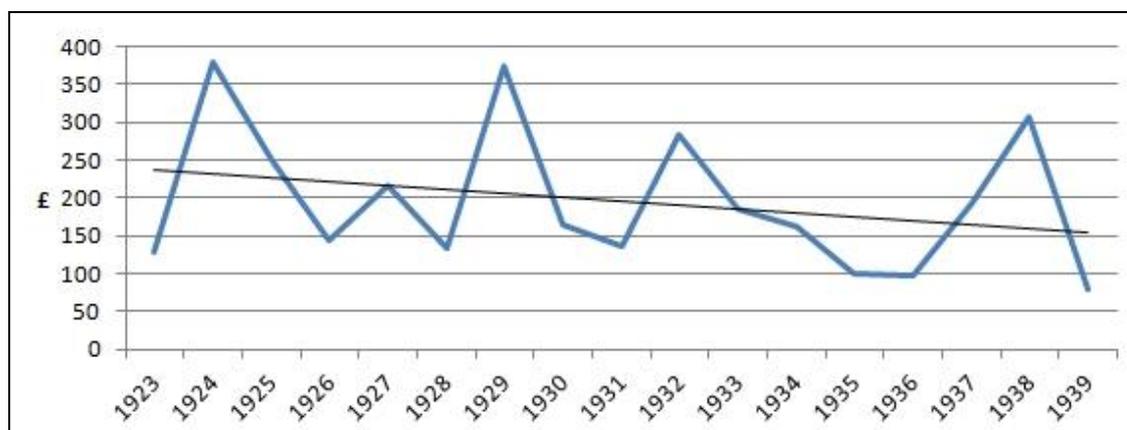
Figure 3.34: *Comparison of the MAF sheep price index and the experience at Crouch Farm, 1930-1939*



⁴³ Graph prepared by author with the addition of figures from the records of Crouch Farm.

Gibbard's experience of the unprofitability of sheep in the mid 1930s is emphasised by Figure 3.35, which shows that the gross surplus on this operation went into decline between 1931 and 1936.⁴⁴ While this is at variance to what is shown by the MAF price index, it underscores the experiences found by a number of studies of sheep farming in the mid 1930s.

Figure 3.35: *Gross surplus of sheep operations at Crouch Farm, 1923-1939*



Although not shown graphically, the pig population increased generally over the period and the horse population declined as mechanisation increased.

Farming bankruptcies

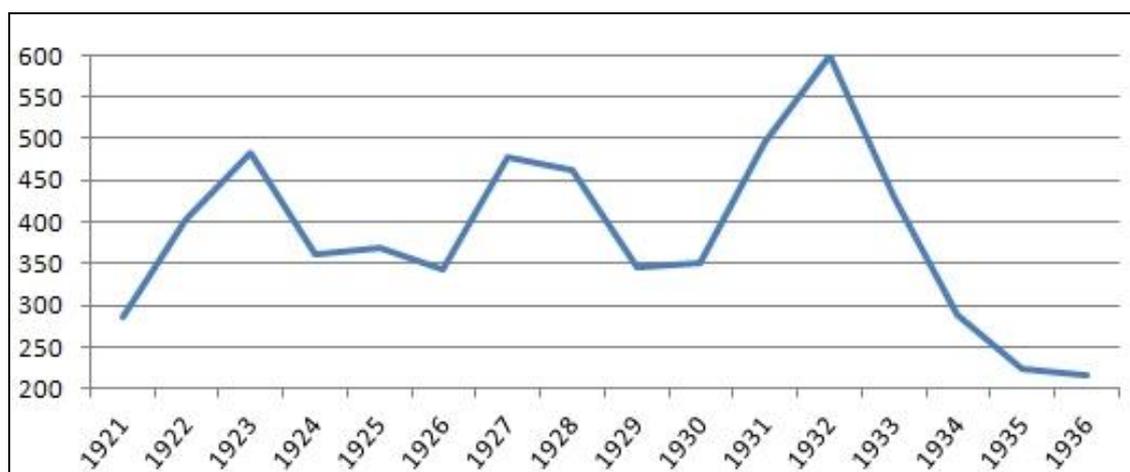
Farming bankruptcies peaked in 1932, as shown in Figure 3.36.⁴⁵ The very wet summer of 1931 and very poor harvest did not help farmers at this very difficult time.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Graph prepared by author from the records of Crouch Farm. The gross surplus is the difference between monies from sales of sheep and wool and those expended on buying in tegs or lambs.

⁴⁵ Graph based on figures in Whetham, *Agrarian History, Volume 8*, pp. 233-234, 238.

⁴⁶ The Meteorological Office, 'Oxford data'.

Figure 3.36: *Farming bankruptcies in England and Wales, 1921-1936*



Bankruptcies rose after 1921, following the period of rapid price deflation and before conditions improved in 1924. They rose again in 1927 as a consequence of the re-introduction of the Gold Standard in 1925. The biggest increase in bankruptcies occurred between 1931 and 1933 as a consequence of the fall-out from the Wall Street crash. Anecdotally, it has been suggested that many farmers walked away from their farms in this latter period.⁴⁷

A wider view of the 1920s from the League of Nations

A retrospective look at the deepening agricultural crisis in the 1920s was provided by a League of Nations report published in 1931.⁴⁸ The report follows an earlier one from 1927, and notes that since then ‘the agricultural situation has grown more serious’. In defining this more closely, it noted that after a period of prosperity during and immediately after the Great War, there was a crisis in 1920 and 1921, followed by a period of improvement in 1924 and 1925 and then a depression, based on a world-wide over-supply of cereals. It is important to put the problems of the United Kingdom in this

⁴⁷ One of the author’s early discussions was with a farmer, whose reminiscences were of significant abandonment of farms between Daventry and Banbury in the early 1930s.

⁴⁸ League of Nations Economic Committee, *The Agricultural Crisis*, I (Geneva, 1931), pp. 5-10.

wider perspective. Agricultural prices were low compared with farmers' costs and, with the exception of Britain, these prices had not kept pace with the prices of industrial products as shown in Table 3.2.⁴⁹ This seems to suggest that the agricultural crisis in Britain was not as severe as for some other countries, albeit the statistics are limited.

Table 3.2: *Indices of wholesale and agricultural prices in five countries, 1926-1929*

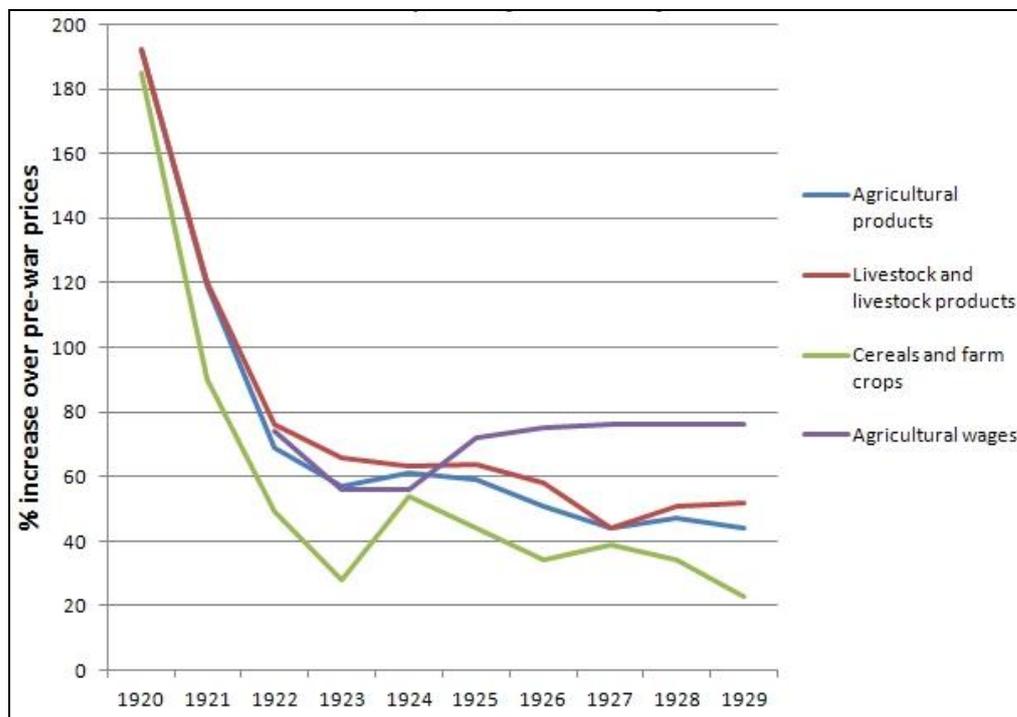
Index 1913 = 100	Wholesale prices				Agricultural products			
	1926	1927	1928	1929	1926	1927	1928	1929
Canada	156.3	152.7	150.6	149.4	143.6	138.6	121.5	157.3
New Zealand	152.6	151.3	168.4	161.3	162	154.1	155.5	155.2
Great Britain	148.1	141.6	140.3	136.5	151	144	147	144
United States	143.3	136.7	140	138.3	136	131	139	138
Germany	137.6	140.2	137.2	124.5	129.3	137.8	134.3	130.2

The section on Great Britain was prepared by the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, with the respective indices of livestock, cereals and wages emphasising the problems faced by cereal growers, as shown in Figure 3.37.⁵⁰ With the greater need for manpower, it shows very clearly that farmers who had a high reliance on arable suffered progressively from 1925 onwards. It also confirms that the uplift in agricultural wages between 1924 and 1926 was a major contributor to farmers' misfortunes with these being maintained despite the decrease in the indices of all farm outputs.

⁴⁹ 'Britain 1924: The Return to the Gold Standard', <http://www.blacksacademy.net/content/3083.html> [accessed 21 October 2012].

⁵⁰ Graph prepared by author from League of Nations, *The Agricultural Crisis*, pp. 175-179.

Figure 3.37: *Comparison of agricultural products and wages for Britain, 1920-1929, compared to pre-war*



Macro-economic summary for the interwar period

The economic data for the interwar period shows little growth in GDP in the 1920s.

However after the Wall Street crash, GDP recovered quickly compared with other major economies, before then remaining flat through the 1930s. Agricultural GDP followed these general trends but turned slightly down after 1933. General and agricultural prices remained in a deflationary spiral until 1934. These macro-economic trends will be seen in most branches of agriculture through the individual studies in the next two chapters.

Livestock fattening was the exception, with this becoming the best-performing sector in the mid 1930s.

Chapter 4

A crisis looming: 'betrayals', deflation and drift up to the eve of the Wall Street crash: 1919-1928 with case-studies

The interwar year period is examined in detail in this chapter and the next, which respectively cover the period up until 1928, and from 1929 until 1939. The split was made for two reasons. First, the fallout from the Wall Street crash of 1929 presaged a major economic change whose effect was likely to have spread to all sectors of the economy. Secondly, trends were identified by the individual studies of farms, as discussed below, pages 218-224, and in Chapter 5, pages 325-334. These indicated a significant change in many aspects and fortunes of farming after 1929.

The political and economic backgrounds to this chapter covers four distinct periods; the immediate aftermath of the war: the severe deflation that took place in 1920-1921: the period of political drift up to 1925: and the period after the Gold Standard was restored.

An overview of farming trends follows for the period 1919-1928, and then farming in the four periods is examined in more detail. Finally, the individual farm operations are studied in order to provide micro-economic evidence to set alongside the macro trends. By analysing individual operations, it was hoped that different trends by farming sector would be identified, so as to answer the question as to which branches of agriculture fared best, and thus why some farmers succeeded whereas others did not.

Political and economic background

The period immediately after the Great War

This farming study needs to be set in the wider context of the political and economic agenda of the time. When the Great War came to an end in November 1918, there was an out-pouring of relief, hope and expectation expressed by Lloyd George of a land ‘fit for heroes to live in’.¹ American president Woodrow Wilson saw a very rosy outlook when he declared in a speech in Manchester on 30 December, ‘I believe that...men are beginning to see, not perhaps the golden age, but an age which at any rate is brightening from decade to decade and may lead us some time to an elevation from which we can see the things for which the heart of mankind has longed.’² Both expressions of hope were to be largely dashed by the events of the next twenty years.

The 1918 coalition government led by Lloyd George, but heavily dominated by Bonar Law’s Conservatives, went to the country soon after the Armistice was signed.³ This was the first election to be held under the 1918 Representation of the People Act, with the pro-Coalition parties winning 526 of the 707 seats, ushering in a 20-year era of Conservative dominance, and with Labour taking over the mantle of opposition from the Asquithian Liberal Party.⁴ The first priority was to help returning servicemen back into civil employment, avoiding images such as that shown in Figure 4.1.

¹ L. Seaman, *Life in Britain between the Wars* (London, 1970), p. 16.

² Woodrow Wilson Presidential Library. wwl2.dataformat.com/Document.aspx?doc=27893 [accessed 30 March 2013].

³ D. Powell, *British Politics, 1910-35: The Crisis of the Party System* (Abingdon, 2004), p. 73.

⁴ M. Pugh, *The Making of Modern British Politics 1867-1945* (Oxford, 2002), pp. 161-163.

Figure 4.1: Image from 1919 about work for ex-servicemen



Inevitably war brings a rapid expansion of money, with the government's budget having risen from £200m in 1914 to £2,000m in 1917, and with the first post-war budget of 1919 at £2,500m. The resultant inflation, shown in Figure 3.7 on page 66, ushered in a short-term boom in 1919. It also guaranteed employment for the majority of servicemen, solving that particular problem much more quickly than any had forecast. Lloyd George skilfully handled the threat from the 'Triple Alliance' of miners, railwaymen and transport workers in 1919, with the miners being bought off temporarily by wage increases. But this immediate post-war period was not strike free, with 35 million days being lost in disputes in 1919. Government was keen to resist the relentless drive for increased wages, and managed to maintain them at existing levels for a year.⁵

⁵ P. Clarke, *Hope and Glory: Britain 1900-2000* (London, 2004), pp. 106-108. C. Mowat, *Britain between the Wars* (1955, London, 1968), pp. 23-26, 31-35, 38-40, 119-125.

Deflation 1920-1921

Like all booms, the bust was not far behind, with the first signs in April 1920.

Industrialists had been encouraged by government to plan for a long period of growth in the demand for British goods, but the export markets simply were not there. Europe was in chaos and other parts of the world, cut off from British products during the war, had either industrialised themselves or found other sources. With the number of unemployed reaching two million by June 1921, the provisions of the Insurance Act of 1920 were unable to cope. Government was now pursuing deflationary policies and putting downward pressure on wages. The slump, which had set in by the end of 1920, brought Britain's three basic industries of coal, shipbuilding and textiles down and laid the seeds of the unemployment which plagued the interwar years.⁶

This seems to have been a period of many 'great betrayals', a term later used by Penning-Rowsell to describe the sudden abolition of price guarantees, and also by Mowat to describe 'Black Friday' (April 15 1920), when the 'Triple Alliance' was broken. Three months later the miners were driven back to work with wage cuts of between 10 and 40 percent. The government won a series of skirmishes over the next 12-18 months, leaving trade unionists feeling betrayed and isolated with membership falling dramatically. The wage index, based on 100 in 1913, fell from its post-war peak of 260 in 1920 to 170 by 1922, the trend being clear in Figure 3.7 on page 66; imports and exports fell by almost 50 percent in 1921 compared with 1920; heavy industry production fell by more than half. Registered unemployment rose from 691,000 in December 1920 to 1,355,000 in March 1921 and to 2,171,000 in June 1921, before falling off and 'stabilising' at 1,500,000 in 1922, with the trend shown in Figure 3.15 on page 71. Government policy

⁶ Powell, *British Politics*, p. 107. Mowat, *Britain between the Wars*, pp. 125-129.

had turned in 1920 to making urgent economies and to dealing with deflation, which affected all sectors of the economy over the next eighteen months or so.⁷

Period of political drift and depression 1922-1925

By 1922, the Conservatives realised that they no longer needed Lloyd George to keep the rise of Labour in check. Bonar Law had resigned through ill health in March 1921, but returned to politics 18 months later as leader of the Conservatives, when its MPs voted to end the coalition, winning the subsequent election in November 1922. The election saw a huge rise in the number of Labour candidates elected, up from 59 in 1918 to 142. Bonar Law retired from office due to illness in May 1923, and Stanley Baldwin took his place.⁸ He became a pivotal and powerful figure for the next 15 years and steered Britain through the stormy post-1929 downturn.⁹ However, it was his decision, ill-judged with hindsight, to take the country into another election in November 1923, despite the substantial majority that he commanded.¹⁰ His principal reason was to secure a mandate for the introduction of tariffs as a way of bringing unemployment down. The result was a reduction of the number of Conservative members from 344 to 258, with the Liberals under Asquith having 158 seats and Labour 191, the first time that the two-party system had been disturbed to such an extent. The absence of a majority proved unworkable and resulted in the resignation of Baldwin's government in January 1924, with the reins being handed over to the Labour leader, Ramsay MacDonald. Despite the obvious arithmetic,

⁷ E. Penning-Rowsell, 'Who 'betrayed' whom? Power and politics in the 1920/1 agricultural crisis', *Agricultural History Review*, 45. 2 (1987), pp. 176, 183. Mowat, *Britain between the Wars*, pp. 125-130.

⁸ Pugh, *Modern British Politics*, pp. 184-185. Mowat, *Britain between the Wars*, pp. 139-145. Seaman, *Life in Britain*, pp. 25-27.

⁹ Clarke, *Hope and Glory*, p. 123.

¹⁰ Pugh, *Modern British Politics*, pp. 186-187.

he refused to form an alliance with the Liberals. Although his tenure was brief, the myth that Labour could not be trusted with power was dispelled by their avoiding radical policies.¹¹ The government fell on 8 October 1924 to a motion of censure over a decision to withdraw the prosecution of the acting editor of the Communist *Workers' Weekly*, earning the accusation that the government was favouring the Communists. The Liberals only polled 42 seats, handing a very large majority to the Conservatives, with Baldwin coming back into office in November 1924.¹²

The Gold Standard restored in 1925

This was the backdrop to 1925, when Winston Churchill chose, on 'good' advice, to restore the gold standard.¹³ After 1919, a co-operative and successful effort had been made to put world monetary systems back on a firm footing, resulting in the gold standard being restored from 1925 onwards, although completion of the entire process took until 1928-1929. In the greatest days of Britain, sterling and gold were interchangeable and Britain, with Churchill as Chancellor of the Exchequer, was determined to retain its past eminence, economic and otherwise, and it had become almost a matter of national honour to restore the gold standard. The error that was made, however, was to restore the pound to its pre-war gold equivalent and its old exchange rate of \$4.87 (in 1920, the pound had fallen to as low as \$3.40 in gold-based dollars). By

¹¹ Pugh, *Modern British Politics*, p. 191. R. Self, *The Evolution of the British Party System 1885-1940* (Harlow, 2000), p. 156.

¹² Graves, *The Long Week-End*, pp. 157-158. Mowat, *Britain between the Wars*, pp. 183-191.

¹³ This standard was basically a process by which the currency in any country was matched by the fixed amount of gold which the government or central bank held. Its modern day equivalent can be seen at work with the euro crisis, with the euro playing the same role in terms of a rigid fixed exchange rate system as did gold. Such approaches were essentially deflationary so, particularly at times of war, countries within the gold standard needed to opt out of this at times of need to inflate the money supply.

returning to gold at the old parity, Britain had accepted the need for a painful depression of prices and wages with accompanying stagnation and unemployment, the rich source of social stress, including the General Strike of 1926, that history has shown it to be.

Arguments still abound as to whether the straight-jacket of the gold standard prevented America from expanding the money supply in order to stimulate the economy and eventually led to the Great Depression. It seems to be agreed that, in the 1920s and 1930s, countries that left the gold standard earlier experienced a faster recovery.¹⁴

The potential for the General Strike of 1926 had been festering for some time. It was precipitated by the end of the government's nine-month subsidy to the coal industry, followed by the mine owners deciding to reduce wages and enforce longer hours. The 'not a minute on the day, not a penny off the pay' chant was taken up by other unions. Government prepared to face the threat, using the experience which it had gained a few years earlier to keep supplies moving. The Labour Party found itself in the same quandary that it faces today, not wanting to condemn the strike but also not able to support an action aimed at the overthrow of law. Conservative backbenchers who thought Baldwin soft were proved wrong when he decided not to settle. The TUC brought out one and a half million key workers in support of the miners on May 3. The General Strike lasted only for nine days with the Trade Union movement cowed, the Labour

¹⁴ T. Gregory, *The Gold Standard and its Future* (London, 1932), pp. 1-2, 30-39. W. Brown, *The International Gold Standard Reinterpreted, 1914-1934*, Book three: Part II, *Completing the International Gold Standard*. (1940, Massachusetts). R. Bootle, 'Spooky parallels between Great Depression and euro crisis', *Daily Telegraph* (10 June 2012). J. Cohen-Setton, 'The Gold Standard and the Euro' (30 March 2012) bruegel.org/blog/detail/article/725-blogs-review-the-gold-standard-and-the-euro/ [accessed 21 October 2012]. 'The Gold Standard', <http://www2.econ.iastate.edu/classes/econ355/choi/golds.htm> [accessed 21 October 2012]. 'Budget Blunders', *BBC News*, http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/events/budget_99/budget_briefing/279928.stm [accessed 21 October 2012]. J. Galbraith, *Money: Whence it Came, Where it Went* (Boston USA, 1975), pp. 174-178.

Movement opting for moderation, and the Conservatives on the front foot.¹⁵ By 1928, universal suffrage had been introduced with the electorate increasing by almost one-third. While the Conservatives polled more votes in the 1929 election, Labour achieved 27 more seats, but insufficient to govern with 59 Liberal MPs holding the balance of power. The problem of unemployment remained to be solved.

Overview of farming trends in the period 1919-1928

Before looking at the farming trends in the period 1919-1928, some general comments are relevant about the type of mixed farming found in the study period in the five main counties of the study area. The trends of grass in these counties were discussed in Chapter 3 and shown in Figure 3.17 on page 74 and, for the five principal counties, in Figure 3.18 on page 75. Northamptonshire, with the third highest level of grass of the five counties, had the highest level of sheep and a high acreage of wheat, and thus can be considered to be a sheep-corn county.¹⁶ Compared with Northamptonshire, Gloucestershire had a very similar percentage of grass and wheat but it had less sheep (albeit more than the other three counties) and more cattle. Warwickshire was less of a sheep-corn county having lower sheep numbers and corn acreage than Northamptonshire and Gloucestershire. Leicestershire, with its Grade I grassland and much higher cattle numbers, was clearly much more of a grazing county. Oxfordshire, on the other hand with its much lower percentage of grass and lower numbers of sheep and cattle, was a more arable county. However, within each county, it would be expected that there would

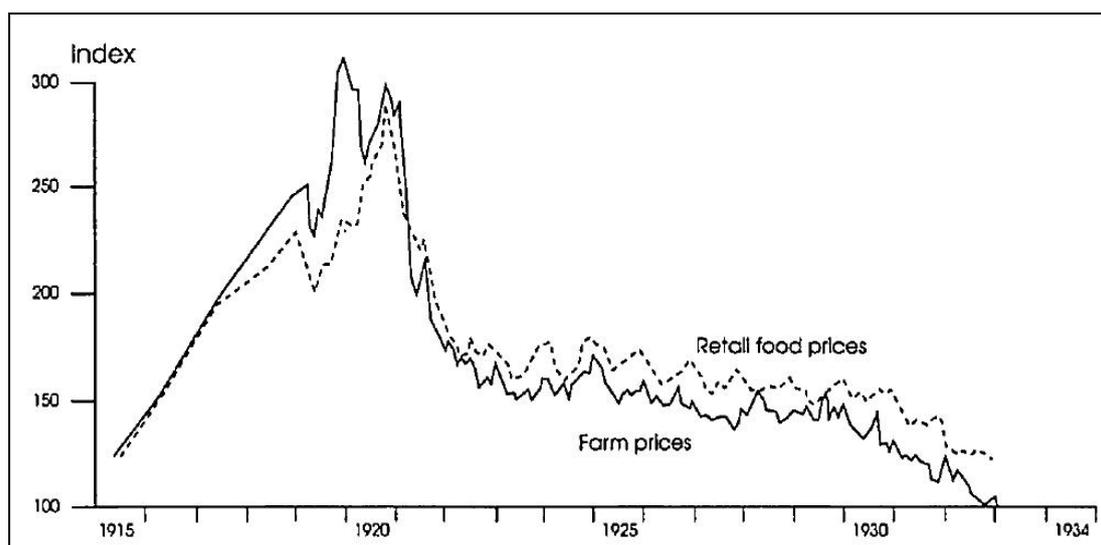
¹⁵ Graves, *The Long Week-End*, pp. 162-167. Clarke, *Hope and Glory*, pp. 140-145

¹⁶ J. Watson, *Rural Britain To-day and To-morrow* (London, 1934), pp. 139-140. Watson interviewed a farmer, Mr Simmons of Newbury, who talked about the simplicity of sheep-corn farming.

have been local differences based on local soil types. The trend lines from the five counties are very similar over the study period, 1919-1939.

The trends in agriculture and agricultural prices are now examined. First, the fortunes of farming relative to other sectors in the 1920s are represented in the next two figures. Figure 4.2, reproduced from Astor's cited work, shows that agricultural farm prices lagged behind the retail price of food after 1921 and through into the 1930s.¹⁷

Figure 4.2: *Index numbers of the retail prices of food and of agricultural products, 1915-1932*



It is important to differentiate this trend from that of wholesale prices generally, as shown in Figure 4.3, reproduced from Venn's work.¹⁸ It shows that agricultural wholesale prices out-performed the general index of wholesale prices in the period 1921-1923, and again after 1929.

¹⁷ Viscount Astor *et al*, *The Planning of Agriculture* (London, 1933).

¹⁸ J. Venn, *The Foundations of Agricultural Economics* (Cambridge, 1933), between pages 540 and 541.

Figure 4.3: *Index of wholesale prices of agricultural products and general commodities, 1913-1933 (Average of 1911-1918=100)*



The conclusion from these two graphs is that retail food prices were higher than farm prices after 1921. On the other hand, farm prices kept level-pegging with other commodities until 1929, when they out-ran these in the depression that followed. The next two figures show the falls in price in greater detail. Figure 4.4 shows the falls in the prices of corn products, with drops between 1920 and 1922 for wheat, barley, and oats of 40.7 percent, 55.3 percent and 49 percent respectively.¹⁹ Comparison with the Statist index in Figure 4.5 provides a very good insight into the relative performances of arable.²⁰

¹⁹ Graph prepared by author from the individual annual statistics for the period of the graph from MAF, *Agricultural Statistics: Report on the Agricultural Returns*. Figures were quoted per hundredweight of 112 lbs, but have been converted to quarters, being defined as 504lb of wheat, 448 lb of barley, 336 lb of oats as shown in Green, *A History of the English Agricultural Labourer*, p. 314. So there may be a slight inconsistency in converting from hundredweight to quarters, presumably the reason why a standard measure of weight was introduced.

²⁰ Graph prepared by author from D. Harkness, *War and British Agriculture* (London, 1941), pp. 37-38. The annual article on wholesale prices in the *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society*, 86, 2 (1923), pp. 206 describes the index of wholesale prices of different commodities, started by a Mr Sauerbeck from 1873-1912, and later run in successive issues of the Journal of the Royal Statistical Society as *The Statist*. However, the numbers quoted by Harkness do not tally with the Wholesale Price Index quoted in successive volumes, in the 1920s and 1930s, of the *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society*. It has to be presumed that Harkness used a reliable source and that the conclusion of this graph can be accepted.

Figure 4.4: Annual average prices of wheat, barley and oats, 1919-1929

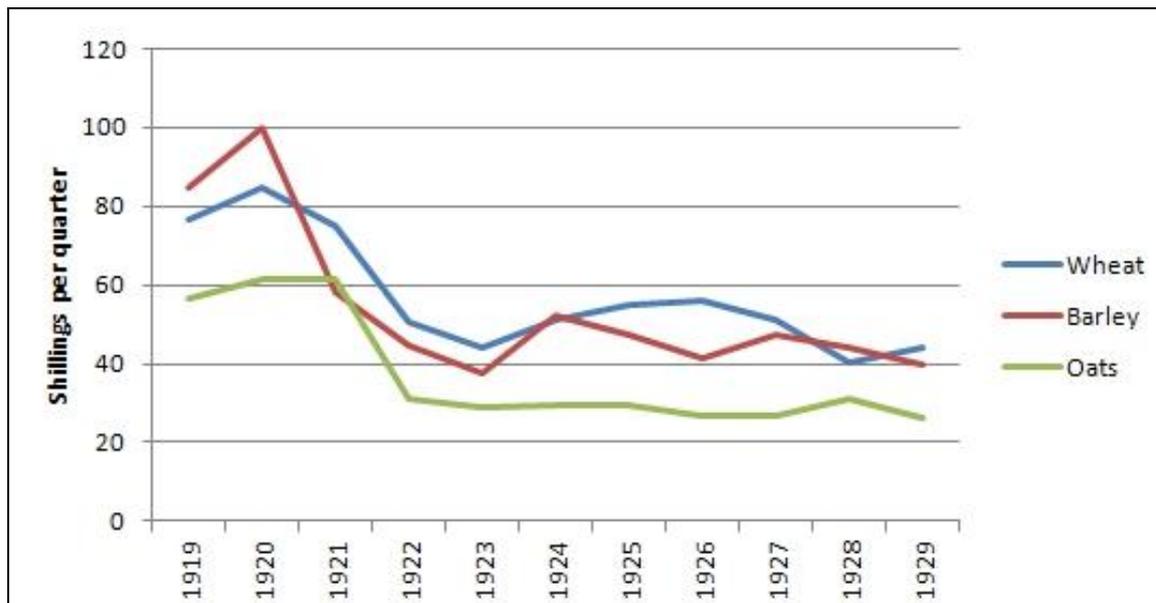


Figure 4.5: Wholesale price indices of corn and crops compared to the Statist index and also the index of fertiliser costs, 1920-1929 – from work by Harkness

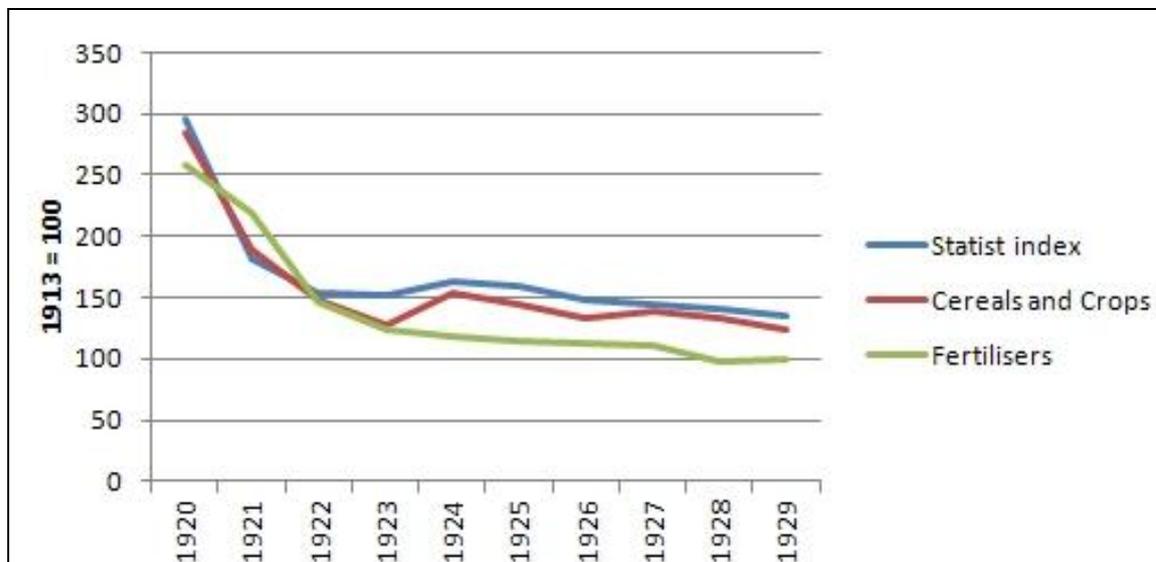


Figure 4.6 shows the rate of decline for livestock, 36.6 percent for cattle and 29.1 percent for sheep between 1920 and 1922, lower than for corn products.²¹ Figure 4.7 shows the trend of livestock prices with the Statist index, and the index of feed costs.²² Comparison with Figure 4.5 shows the better performance of livestock, compared with arable

Figure 4.6: Annual average prices of livestock, 1919-1929

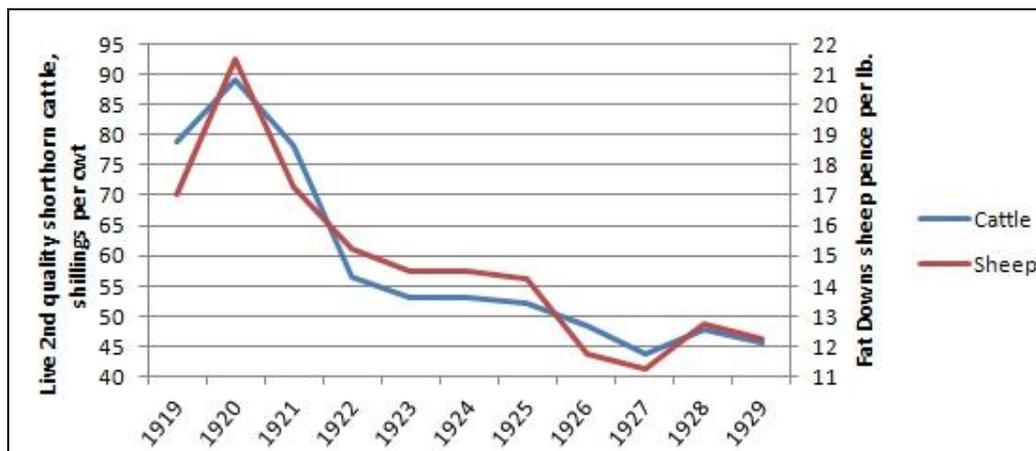
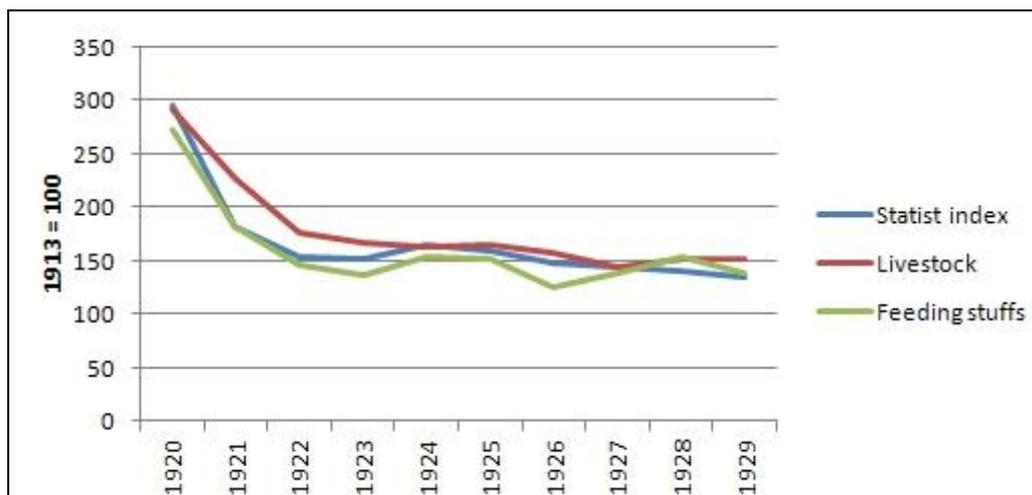


Figure 4.7: Wholesale price indices of livestock compared to the Statist index and also the index of feed costs, 1920-1929 – from work by Harkness



²¹ Graph prepared by author from the individual annual statistics for the period of the graph from MAF, *Agricultural Statistics: Report on the Agricultural Returns*. The cattle figures relate to second quality shorthorns, and the sheep to ‘downs’ sheep.

²² Graphs prepared by author from Harkness, *War and British Agriculture*, pp. 37-38.

The comparisons with the Statist index in Figures 4.5 and 4.7 provide a very good insight into the relative performances of arable and grazing, as the cost of fertilisers and feedstuffs is taken into account, and these provide a very good backdrop to a study of farming in the 1920s. Arable products underperformed and livestock outperformed the Statist index through the 1920s. These trends were helped by the prices of fertiliser and feedstuff costs also underperforming this index. By 1929 prices were almost universally half their pre-deflation level.

Farming in the period immediately after the Great War

Country Life reported contemporary commentary on farming and also the health of the market in land. It was not long before warning calls were evident from its leader writer and also in the columns of its *Country Notes*. In addition, the minutes of the county branches of the Farmers' Union, as well as proceedings at the Farmers' Club, help to build up an accurate picture of the problems facing farmers.²³ Wartime controls had created a totally false economic structure, with often the loudest voice (particularly the agricultural labourers) gaining the advantage in a constant spiral of increasing costs and prices. One of the threads through the local Farmers' Union minutes from the end of the War in November 1918 for the next 12 months was the failure of the organisations charged with these controls to carry out expedient action, or action at all. This resulted

²³ Northamptonshire Farmers' Union minutes articulated the issues particularly well, and the Warwickshire branch formed in 1918 was also a good source. Leicestershire branch minutes, which started in 1920, are not as professionally taken in the early days often leading to ambiguity in interpretation; tended to deal with more mundane local issues; and appeared to be less proactive. Staffordshire, formed in 1919, was also not as proactive as Northamptonshire and the minutes from 1925 to early 1928 were also missing. Because Derbyshire was focused on milk, fewer quotes were taken from this source.

from lack of guidance to these organisations as to what was required of them.²⁴ The knock-on effect of this was to complicate the role of the farmer. As a result, over the nine months after the war ended, local Farmers' Union meetings proliferated. Having been vociferous about governmental interference in 1917, as the war came to an end farmers were of a different mind about cattle and other agricultural prices and wanted to see controls maintained, and even prices raised in view of the large increase in the cost of production.²⁵ Their position can be understood, though, as the huge rise in agricultural wages required the other end of the equation to be balanced. Already it appeared that, due to the difficulties of selling their wheat, farmers were clamouring for a control of imports or import tariffs to be introduced.²⁶ Furthermore, in some areas farmers saw that a co-operative approach to sales would now be essential with, for example, the local Warwickshire Farmers' Union being in the vanguard of a Midlands scheme fashioned on schemes operating in Manchester and Preston.²⁷ Elsewhere in the country the farmers of Norfolk were, in April 1919, airing their grievances about the falling market for their goods coupled with a rise in wages forced on them by the government, and were demanding price support, while farmers in Yorkshire wanted to have the Wages Board abolished.²⁸

The perspectives of the larger farmers can be picked up from papers at the Farmers' Club. There was a very timely reflection on the state of agriculture as the Great War

²⁴ NRO, ML 3810-3811, county Farmers' Union records, 1918-1919. SRO, D 4955/1/1, county Farmers' Union records, 1919. WRO, CR 3157/1/1, county Farmers' Union records, 1918-1919.

²⁵ NRO, ML 3810, minutes of meeting of 1 February 1919.

²⁶ WRO, CR 3157/1/1, minutes of meetings of 27 December 1918 and 29 January 1919.

²⁷ WRO, CR 3157/1/1, minutes of meetings of 27 December 1918, 10 and 17 April and 22 May 1919.

²⁸ *CL*, 45, 1164 (26 April 1919), p. 453.

came to an end, with a talk in December 1918 by Haviland, a member of the Agricultural Policy Sub-Committee of the Reconstruction Committee.²⁹ Its policies were clear from what he says. Minimum prices for wheat and oats must be ‘continued indefinitely’; education and technical progress were the keys to increases in production; higher wage rates were essential to safeguard the future of agriculture; bad farmers must be rooted out with the Board of Agriculture being able to dispossess and replace these. His audience, however, was hostile to all this with the general message that farmers did not need controls or commissions to run their businesses; telling them how much to pay labourers; and dictating that land must be broken up while not offering a return to those that did so. While it has to be the case that the members of the Farmers’ Club would have comprised the larger, better organised, and more successful farmers, the opposition that was voiced suggested everything that was probably wrong with the government’s approach to farming in the UK. So, while these farmers may have benefited from the guaranteed prices during the war, it was absolutely clear (and remained so in the pages of this journal over the next three to four years) that this audience of farmers did not want controls to continue.³⁰ Martin Sutton, chairman of the Club, saw the position of agriculture becoming more serious day by day on account of the rise in minimum wages.³¹ He pointed out that farmers had moved progressively out of wheat production since the 1880s as it did not pay with wages of 20s, so could not see that there was any hope of it paying with a 40s wage. In the paper that followed, Malcolmson set out typical costs of growing one acre of wheat in the years 1913-1914 and 1917-1918, with a forecast of

²⁹ W. Haviland, ‘Report of Agricultural Policy Sub-committee of the Reconstruction Committee’, *Journal of the Farmers’ Club* (London, December 1918).

³⁰ *Journal of the Farmers’ Club*, 1919-1923, *passim*.

³¹ *Journal of the Farmers’ Club*, (London, April 1919), pp. 39-40. Martin Sutton, Chairman’s opening comments to paper by Malcolmson, ‘The economic future of agriculture’.

what would happen in 1920-1921 without a guaranteed minimum price.³² He argued against land nationalisation but rather for import duties on foodstuffs and these taxes to be used to prop up British agriculture. The figures, on which he based his talk, showed the cost of production of an acre of wheat having risen from £8 12s 0d in 1913 to £15 2s 6d in 1917. With wheat selling at 75/6d per quarter in 1917, this had resulted in a much increased profit per acre of 79/6d, compared with 8s per acre in 1913. In his forecast to 1921-1922, he assumed that costs would remain static and that, without support, the price of wheat would fall to 45/6d per quarter, whereupon the profit would be converted into a loss of 42/6d per acre. As we now know, costs were to spiral upwards, but his estimate of the price to which wheat would fall if unsupported was realistic with the price falling to less than 48s in 1922. The price of milk, which had troubled farmers and the NFU during the War, continued to be an issue through the summer of 1919 with farmers, who generally did not cost their operations, suddenly realising that dairying was losing money, with the result that they were starting to abandon this.³³

Landowners were not slow to get their viewpoint across with *Country Life* reporting that Hugh Corbet, owner of the Sundorne Castle Estate in Shropshire, had called his tenants together to tell them that he was to sell and citing 'the large increase in interest on encumbrances on his estate in the last 100 years', as well as the 'great rise' in wages and very heavy calls on his income which was not derived from land.³⁴ The editor added his

³² V. Malcolmson, 'The economic future of agriculture', *Journal of the Farmers' Club*, (London, April 1919), pp. 42-44. Malcolmson was Lord of the Manor of Aston in Hertfordshire from 1907 and appears to have been a highly respected agriculturist.

³³ NRO, ML 3810, minutes of meeting of 17 May 1919.

³⁴ *CL*, 45, 1165 (3 May 1919), p. 484.

own view that very few people realised that landowners required other sources of income and that many were only able to carry on with their low-rented estates due to wealth in other quarters. Fortunately, at least, the 1910 Land Tax Act, which had been a failure, was about to be repealed, and the new 'Domesday Book' was not progressing.³⁵

In June 1919, coinciding with the announcement of Lord Ernle's resignation from the Board of Agriculture, *Country Life* railed at the £47m annual subsidy to maintain the nine-penny loaf, with this subsidy costing the taxpayer three pence for each loaf. It also protested against the whole economic structure of agriculture based on 'a system of props' and an artificially high wage structure for labourers.³⁶ In June 1919 it reported the incredible decision by the Wages Board that labourers should stop work at 5 pm, with the forthright view that 'no regulation equally ridiculous was ever introduced into husbandry'.³⁷ Farmers and commentators alike called this the worst of the new Agriculture Committee's many mistakes for, with the mornings unsuitable for harvest because of the dew, the farmer was left paying normal rates when little work could be done, and overtime for the harvest which was, of course, best carried out in the late afternoon and early evening.³⁸ However, there were worse problems brewing with the weather in 1919 having decided not to co-operate with the food programme. The autumn sown crops had not done well as the winter period was cold and wet through to April. The spring sowing had taken place in wet conditions, and no sooner were these sown than May and the first half of June became very hot and dry, followed by a cool second

³⁵ The provision of the 1910 Finance Act was dubbed the new Domesday survey.

³⁶ *CL*, 45, 1170 (7 June 1919), p. 640.

³⁷ *CL*, 45, 1172 (21 June 1919), pp. 739.

³⁸ *CL*, 45, 1172 (21 June 1919), pp. 739-740. *CL*, 46, 1181 (23 August 1919), p. 231.

half of June and an even cooler and wet July.³⁹ The result, according to one farmer, was that a field of swedes had not put down proper roots, and was literally blown out of the ground by a storm on August 26.⁴⁰ The yields of hay and root crops to feed cattle were being forecast to be only a quarter of the normal.

To emphasise the imbalance between wages costs and income from corn crops, *Country Life* gave an example of a 100-acre farm employing three labourers at 45s and costing annually £350.⁴¹ The farm produced 100 quarters of wheat at the still-high price of 70s. It had an annual income of £350, the same as the wage cost, but this did not take into account the cost of capital; of seed, horses and manure; and the now 'serious cost' of mechanical threshing. So, notwithstanding the fact that these comments were written when the guaranteed minimum prices were still in place, *Country Life* concluded that farming cannot carry 'the stupendous handicap of having to pay the labourer enhanced wages for greatly shortened hours of work'.⁴² On the farm in the meantime, and as shown by both *Country Life* and the Northamptonshire Farmers' Union, it was a period of sniping at the Board of Agriculture, the Ministry of Food, and the Agricultural Wages Board. Farmers were up in arms at the proposed reduction in weekly hours from 54 to 50,

³⁹ J. Stratton, *Agricultural Records A.D. 220-1968* (London, 1969), pp. 138-9. However, weather observations from periodicals such as *Country Life* must be treated with caution as, for example, the Oxford weather data from The Meteorological Office, 'Oxford data', does not indicate a particularly cold or wet period through to April 1919. The same data notes nothing exceptional about the June and July weather either, but May was unusually dry in this area, and this may well have adversely affected germination.

⁴⁰ *CL*, 46, 1183 (6 September 1919), p. 291.

⁴¹ *CL*, 46, 1175 (12 July 1919), p. 36.

⁴² *CL*, 46, 1179 (9 August 1919), p. 159.

threatening to grass down their land and lay off their workers.⁴³ Dairy farmers were in the thick of the political turmoil and their case was taken up by *Country Life* referring, in uncustomary language, to some of the Board of Agriculture's outpourings as 'clap-trap', particularly noting that a milker's wage, 17s per week before the war, was now 50s but that the farmer had to pay more as:

the statutory hours of labour do not enable the morning and afternoon milkings to find space within these limits. How crazy is this to fix hours which do not include those necessary! So the farmer is having to pay 60s, so consumers should note that he has to pay for this most absurd arrangement made by the Wages Board.⁴⁴

It seems that farmers protested with their feet. At the first hiring fair of autumn 1919 at Driffield, farmers were absent, while hundreds of labourers made a fruitless journey. The unions had urged their members only to take on short engagements, playing into the hands of the farmers, who were now inclined to lay off men when they were not needed.⁴⁵ Reporting in the last three months of 1919 was almost totally dominated by the decision of the Wages Board to push up labour rates, while reducing the working week. In a very outspoken paper to the Farmers' Club on 8 December (a week or so before the Royal Commission reported), Sir Trustram Eve, president of the Rating Surveyors Association, argued that he was 'independent of everyone, and therefore able to call a spade a spade'.⁴⁶ The thrust of his hard-hitting paper was that agriculture had been consumed into the political arena, expressed in the following terms:

⁴³ *CL*, 46, 1189 (18 October 1919), p. 477. NRO, ML 3811, minutes of meeting of 11 October 1919. WRO, CR 3157/1/1, minutes of meeting of 16 October 1919.

⁴⁴ SRO, D4995/1/1, minutes of meeting of 20 September 1919. *CL*, 46, 1192 (8 November 1919), p. 575.

⁴⁵ *CL*, 46, 1193 (15 November 1919), p. 615.

⁴⁶ H. Eve, 'State control and agriculture', *Journal of the Farmers' Club*, (London, December 1919), pp. 115-122, the quote is from p. 122.

Some young Unionists wanted the votes of the agricultural labourer...and with the help of certain Members of Parliament representing Labour, they had a deal whereby in exchange for a minimum wage the principle of a minimum price for wheat and oats would be conceded.⁴⁷

Eve proceeded through a very elaborate examination of the three volumes of published evidence to the 1919 Royal Commission on Agriculture, and this source can be commended to any scholar embarking on an analysis of the absurdities of government decision-making.⁴⁸ He argued that the 1917 Corn Production Act had no effect on the increase in the cereal-growing areas in the east of the country, and had not been asked for by either farmers or labourers.⁴⁹ He found it risible that farmers were 'encouraged' to break up their grasslands with a promise of decreasing corn prices. As to the hated Wages Board, he argued that its independence meant that its powers were almost limitless to fix whatever rate it thought appropriate, while the farmer had the minimum price for wheat and oats fixed without reference to either profit or risk. At the heart of his assassination of the whole process of control, was his exposure of the guesswork that went into it. He quoted a schedule of the commission members' evidence as to the corn price guarantees suggested, which ranged from 45-90s per quarter for wheat, 48/9d-60s for oats and 60-80s for barley, with suggested periods of one to ten years for the guarantees to continue. His uncompromising view about these commission members was to 'take these young prophets down to a brook and there slay them'.⁵⁰ In conclusion, he argued for the repeal of the Corn Production Act. It was inevitable that such a hard-hitting paper should provoke the huge volume of comment that followed, not all of which supported Trustram

⁴⁷ Eve, 'State control and agriculture', p. 116.

⁴⁸ <https://archive.org/details/minutesofevidenc01greauoft> [accessed 15 October 2013], and similar references for minutes of evidence 02, 03 and 04.

⁴⁹ Question 228 of the evidence is quoted.

⁵⁰ Eve, 'State control and agriculture', p. 121.

Eve's viewpoint. One speaker reminded farmers that five hundred of them had crowded into Caxton Hall only seven weeks before to hear the Prime Minister talk about the Corn Production Act and had cheered him when he pointed out that it had brought two million acres under cultivation, and thus had proved itself worthy of continuance.⁵¹

With the divergence of farmer opinion that day, it is perhaps hardly surprising that when the Commission published its interim report in the middle of December 1919, this comprised a Majority Report from twelve members exhorting the retention of guaranteed prices and a Minority Report from the other eleven members advocating reversion to the principles of free trade. In winding up a year of upheavals in farming, the leader writer of *Country Life* believed that the labourer, who had done well monetarily, had lost his work ethic; that the farmer had lost his initiative with Whitehall dictating to him what he must do; and that nobody cared about the landowner, left out in the cold. With a final swipe at the guesswork behind the Royal Commission, *Country Notes* asked whether anyone knew the costs of production, which government must 'surely ascertain beyond question'.⁵²

The much-vaunted ploughing-up campaign had, as Northamptonshire records have shown in Chapter 2, page 57, resulted in orders being issued to break up 47,779 acres out of 62,926 acres scheduled for consideration.⁵³ Across the country, the position had become very grave, and the statistics in Table 4.1 show that the short-term increases in arable land had swiftly been reversed by 1919.⁵⁴

⁵¹ Eve, 'State control and agriculture', pp. 129. Perren, *Agriculture in Depression*, p. 38.

⁵² *CL*, 46, 1198 (20 December 1919), pp. 828-829. Horn, *Rural Life in England*, pp. 68-71.

⁵³ NRO, X 4209, county War Agricultural Committee minutes.

⁵⁴ *CL*, 46, 1186 (27 September 1919), p. 384.

Table 4.1: *Variation in crop areas and livestock in England and Wales, 1919 compared with 1918*

1919 compared with 1918	Change
Wheat	-335,500 acres
Oats	-217,090 acres
Barley, rye, beans, peas	Slight increase
Potatoes	-158,000 acres
Overall arable	-237,540 acres
Horses	-8250
Cows and heifers in milk	+85,000
Cattle over 2 years	Good increase
Young stock	Decrease
Sheep	-1.35m

In food production terms, the position was even worse, as shown in Table 4.2 reproduced from Sheail's paper.⁵⁵

Table 4.2: *Estimated food production of cereals and potatoes in England and Wales, as indicated by official statistics (thousands of tons)*

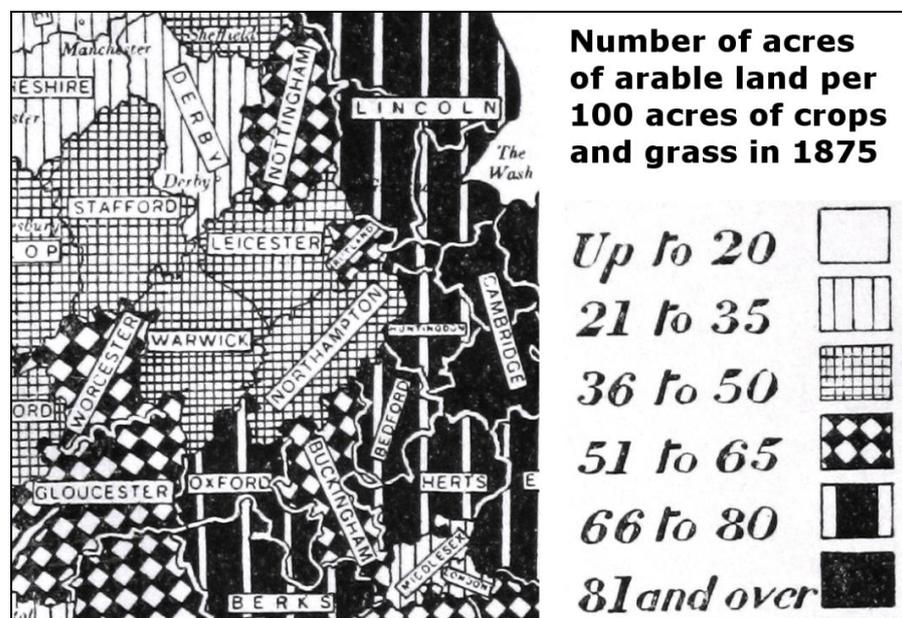
000's tons	Wheat	Barley	Oats	Potatoes
1885	2,093	1,702	1,316	2,395
1895	997	1,465	1,315	2,746
1905	1,572	1,201	1,425	2,783
1914	1,634	1,184	1,340	2,953
1915	1,880	866	1,452	2,858
1916	1,498	989	1,452	2,505
1917	1,567	1,051	1,471	3,341
1918	2,339	1,168	2,010	4,209
1919	1,763	1,052	1,566	2,733

These figures show, in very stark terms, the way in which wheat production had fallen in the great grassing-down period at the end of the nineteenth century; the success of the wheat campaign by the last year of the war; and the very quick fall-off of wheat and all

⁵⁵ J. Sheail, 'Land improvement and reclamation', p. 122.

other cereal products and potatoes by 1919. With feed crops also badly affected by the weather, serious shortages were expected by the winter of 1919-1920. The Board of Agriculture confessed to the 13 percent drop in wheat, and the *Country Life* editor declared that the war-time appeal for food production had already lost its effect. In an article headed ‘The Day of the Tractor Plough’, the editor saw a new generation of farmers and equipment as providing farming’s salvation.⁵⁶ Urging the Board of Agriculture not to interfere with the practice of husbandry, he warned of resentment by farmers to the ‘gentleman from London who knows nothing about it’.⁵⁷ With ploughing-up being swiftly reversed after the war, it is opportune to consider the overall extent of grassing-down in the 1920s with these compared against the position in 1875 as shown by extracts from the MAF maps for that year, and for 1925, in Figures 4.8 and 4.9.⁵⁸ They show that the grassing-down was fairly uniform except in the east.

Figure 4.8: *Acreage of arable land in 1875 compared with crops and grass*

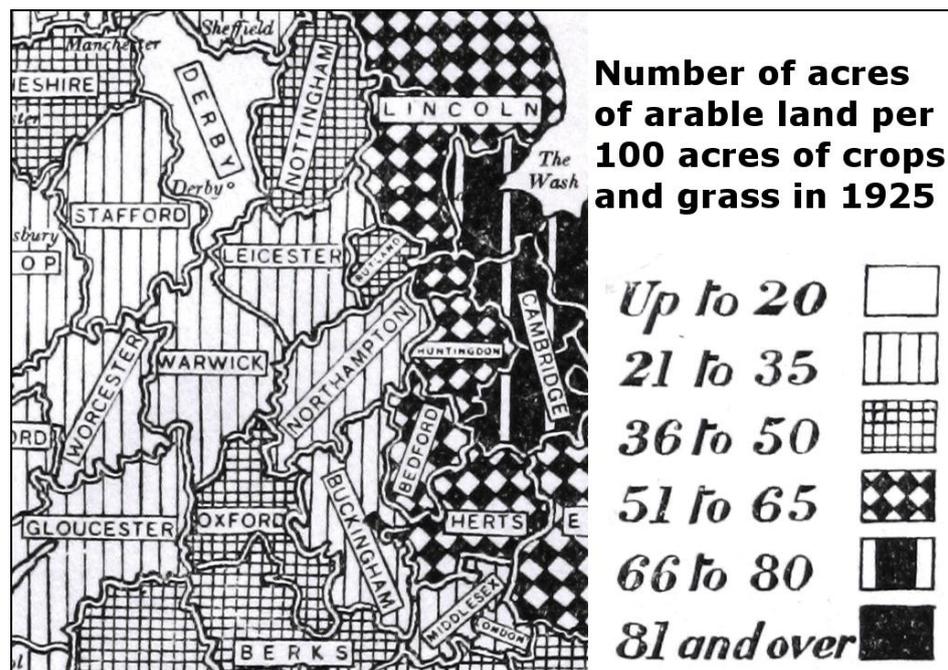


⁵⁶ *CL*, 46, 1185 (20 September 1919), p. 352.

⁵⁷ *CL*, 46, 1186 (27 September 1919), p. 384.

⁵⁸ MAF, *The Agricultural Output of England and Wales 1925* (HMSO, 1927).

Figure 4.9: *Acreage of arable land in 1925 compared with crops and grass*



Guaranteed minimum prices had not been called upon either during the war or immediately after it, as prices continued their steep rise as shown in Figures 4.2 and 4.3, pages 98 and 99. This fuelled land values and thus the sale of estates. So it was a particularly difficult decision for the 1919 Royal Commission on Agriculture wrestling with the conflicting issues of controls which had so clearly failed to curb prices and to increase food production; a real fear of world shortages; and thus the risk of serious hunger resulting. When the Commission reported in December 1919, it referred to the doubts expressed by the farming community about the continuation of guaranteed cereal prices. Farmers wanted to see the end of controls and were prepared to abandon these guarantees in order to get rid of the unwelcome bureaucratic interference so as to re-establish their independence. Despite this, the Majority Report in favour of continuing the system of guarantees was accepted and led to the Agriculture Act of 1920, passed in December of that year. Guaranteed prices were to continue, the Wages Board remained, and there was to be a continuation of the standard of cultivation, although these controls

were emasculated by the House of Lords.⁵⁹ The Act was founded on producer protection, rather than the securing of supply to the benefit of the consumer. It is interesting to reflect that the Minority Report contended that there was no immediate risk of grain prices falling to un-remunerative levels, a stance that must have embarrassed them a year later. With hindsight, it would not have mattered greatly to most farmers if the decision to revert to the principles of free trade had been made then rather than seven months later when this short-lived hey-day for the farmer came to an end.⁶⁰ The Royal Commission itself was stood down at the beginning of March 1920, welcomed in uncompromising language by *Country Life* as ‘good riddance’ to a body that was useless at making policy.⁶¹ There had been many reservations about it from those who claimed that it should have had a higher role of considering the economic prospects of agriculture, rather than just being the government’s poodle in fixing prices.

With the die cast in terms of policy, both the columns of *Country Life* and the deliberations of some of the county Farmers’ Union branches turned to milk prices in the first quarter of 1920. Mixed messages emanate from the latter, sometimes urging restoration of a free market, and sometimes clinging to another few months of price-fixing for milk.⁶² Other issues continued to be debated through the media, with Sir Charles Fielding, previously Director General of Food Production, arguing for self-sufficiency of this, in preparation for another war, by using a recipe of putting onto the

⁵⁹ Penning-Rowsell, ‘Who ‘betrayed’ whom?’, pp. 177-180.

⁶⁰ Horn, *Rural Life in England*, pp. 68-71. The debate between free trade and guaranteed prices is absent from the *Journal of the Farmers’ Club* after Eve’s paper of December 1919, with no further references in the years 1920-1922.

⁶¹ *CL*, 47, 1209 (6 March 1920), pp. 290-1.

⁶² NRO, ML 3812, minutes of meetings of 17 January, 27 March and 24 April 1920. SRO, D 4995/1/1, minutes of meeting of 7 February 1920.

land 250,000 women and 500,000 men, who were either unemployed or in unproductive work that women could do instead. Furthermore, he opined that the state should guarantee the farmer a livelihood for 10 years. There was also a rather more constructive proposal to address the iniquity of local taxation on farmers, who were taxed at 30s per acre and thus for a 500 acre farm faced a bill of £750, a sum equivalent to their income, whereas a professional man with the same income paid local tax of only £75.⁶³ Also in March 1920, the Wages Board increased the minimum wage to 42s, and almost simultaneously the government announced that, in view of the serious decline of the wheat acreage, they would guarantee the farmer the average world price of imported wheat up to a maximum of 95s per quarter for 1920, and 100s for 1921; with this minimum being based upon and varying with the cost of production, subject to four years' notice of withdrawal.⁶⁴ Workers were agitating for higher wages and, hard on the heels of the increase to 42s, was a proposal in early 1920 to increase them again to 50s.⁶⁵

With government's proposals taking shape in the Agricultural Bill, it was not short of critics. It was argued that there was nothing to encourage a single acre being brought into cultivation; there was no stimulus for experimentation; and that landowners were left out in the cold snuffing out the obvious source of capital for agriculture.⁶⁶ Generally, but not universally, farmers remained up in arms about the proposal to continue state control of farming, with interference over what they grow and how they grow it.⁶⁷ There was some

⁶³ *CL*, 47, 1206 (14 February 1920), p. 190. *CL*, 47, 1207 (21 February 1920), pp. 224-5.

⁶⁴ Green, *A History of the English Agricultural Labourer*, pp. 323-5.

⁶⁵ WRO, CR 3157/1/2, minutes of meeting of 22 April 1920.

⁶⁶ *CL*, 47, 1224 (19 June 1920), p. 866.

⁶⁷ *CL*, 48, 1226 (3 July 1920), p. 3. WRO, CR 3157/1/2, minutes of meeting of 24 June 1920. SRO, D 4995/1/1, minutes of meeting of 7 August 1920 notes that Staffordshire farmers were divided on whether to keep state control or go for a free market.

softening of attitudes with government apparently accepting that county Agricultural Committees should not have the powers to require changes in the system of farming but only be able to insist on good husbandry, a not unreasonable *quid pro quo* for the system of guaranteed prices.⁶⁸ Through June and July 1920, there were ongoing negotiations between the Northamptonshire Farmers' Union and the two workers' Unions, the National Agricultural Labourers and Rural Workers, on the wage rates for the harvest period. The very militant demands started at 105s for the four 60-hour harvest weeks, and were finally settled at 70s. The very high demands by the Unions were later described by *Country Life* as a fool's paradise which would lead inevitably to unemployment (as it did), and by the Northamptonshire Farmers' Union as a 'mistake' in forcing wages up.⁶⁹ The position of dairying, on the other hand, was akin to another world, presumably because of the political nature of the price of a pinta, so much so that there were two government departments, the Milk Distribution Board and the Agricultural Wages Board controlling and even championing the wages of dairymen, a position about which several local Farmers' Union branches protested.⁷⁰ The discussions on the milk price were almost endless but, unlike the guaranteed prices of corn, the farmers were not arguing for removal of all controls, while in Leicestershire, one of the members of the local Farmers' Union resigned when NFU Head Office would not support the fusion of the Co-operatives with United Dairies.⁷¹ What is clear is that United Dairies were becoming too powerful and Farmers' Union branches in many counties took a stand on a proposal to

⁶⁸ NRO, ML 3812, minutes of meeting of 3 July 1920.

⁶⁹ NRO, ML 3812, minutes of meetings of 26 June, 3 July, 11 July 1920, 22 January 1921. *CL*, 48, 1243 (30 October 1920), p. 556.

⁷⁰ NRO, ML 3812, minutes of meetings of 7 August and 11 September 1920. SRO, D 4995/1/1, minutes of meeting of 7 August 1920. WRO, CR 3157/1/2, minutes of meeting of 11 August 1920.

⁷¹ ROLLR, DE 3565/3 Minutes of meeting of 11 September 1920.

reduce milk prices from those agreed a year earlier.⁷² However, the other and more serious enemy of farming had been at work, with rain in the summer of 1920 falling on 38 out of 55 days from 9 June to 2 August, the rain battering the crops down and causing serious potato blight, and to add to these woes, labourers refused to work after 5 p.m.⁷³

Land sales

Immediately after the war, land sales had not been deterred by the increase in the rate of Death Duty to 40 percent, since this only applied to estates of over £2m.⁷⁴ *Country Life* reported on 19 July 1919 that this had been the third consecutive week when land sales had exceeded £1m but that tenants often were not the willing buyers – or buyers at all – of their holdings with some deciding to retire and others getting out of the business.⁷⁵

Commenting in 1922, the patrician Liberal MP, Charles Masterson, considered that this was ‘perhaps the greatest change in the history of the land of England since the Norman conquest’.⁷⁶ Those who did buy appear to have done so out of almost necessity as Lord Addison, later Minister of Agriculture, wrote in 1939:

All over the country farmers bought their farms because they wanted to retain their home and occupation – but they bought at a high price. They usually had to borrow two-thirds of the purchase price on mortgage and, for the rest, often put in all the money that they had. Not infrequently some of the balance came from bank overdrafts on the security of their stock or general credit.⁷⁷

⁷² WRO, CR 3157/1/2, minutes of meeting of 22 September 1920.

⁷³ *CL*, 48, 1232 (14 August 1920), p. 200.

⁷⁴ Beard, *English Landed Society*, p. 41.

⁷⁵ *CL*, 46, 1176 (19 July 1919), p. 88.

⁷⁶ Quoted on BBC Two, 1 October 2014, *Long Shadow*. The quote is from H. Perking, *The Rise of Professional Society: England since 1880* (London 2003), p. 251.

⁷⁷ Lord Addison, *A Policy for British Agriculture* (London, 1939), pp. 31-32.

Among those who advocated that tenants should buy was landowning farmer, S. F. Edge, who argued (as did the *Country Life* editorial team) that owner-occupier farming was the only answer as his tenanted farms had ‘meagre crops and general foul condition of the land’.⁷⁸ Edge went on to reinforce the case that landowning with tenant farmers did not give an adequate return, and could only be indulged in by the rich. On the other hand, *Country Life* argued that, particularly with the government’s proposal to give security of tenure to farmers, rents were so low (giving an inadequate return to owners) that there was little incentive to farmers to buy, as they would pay more on interest on their purchase money than their rent. In the leader writer’s opinion, the first wave of buyers immediately after the war had been those who had made much money in the war. Many of these were not existing farmers, but new ones bringing new ideas into the industry.⁷⁹ By the end of November 1919, there were signs that the boom in land sales had already nearly exhausted itself, leaving the owner to ‘patiently wait for the farmer to farm his land in such a way that the Board of Agriculture will be pleased’.⁸⁰ This may answer the apparent contradiction as to why relatively few tenants came forward to buy their farms when parts of the Wakefield Estate in Northamptonshire were offered for sale in 1919 and 1920, some having been carried forward from a failure to sell in 1913.⁸¹ At its auction on 22 October 1919, the majority of the 22 farms, between 100 and 400 acres, had been sold in advance, but whether to tenants or not is not known. Sales varied from £10-43 per acre with an average of £22 per acre; 14-30 years purchase (with an average

⁷⁸ *CL*, 46, 1179 (9 August 1919), p. 185. Edge had already argued at the Farmers’ Club in February 1919, following a paper given by R. Rew, that he farmed 1000 acres as a tenant, 1000 acres as an owner, and 1000 acres as a landlord, and that he intended to get out of the latter as soon as possible.

⁷⁹ *CL*, 46, 1193 (15 November 1919), p. 614.

⁸⁰ *CL*, 46, 1195 (29 November 1919), p. 680.

⁸¹ NRO, SC 106, SC 233 and G3988.

21 years purchase); and rents ranged from 12-39s per acre (with an average of 21s). Sales of two farms, both around 140 acres, on Captain Sawbridge's estate in East Haddon on 16 April 1919 had averaged £25 per acre and 23 years purchase with rents of 22s per acre.⁸²

Contemporary references

In *Farmer's Glory*, a book described by Howkins as a 'thinly disguised autobiography of a working farmer', Street had described farmers' reaction to the ending of the conflict, soon after which he had taken on the Wiltshire family-tenanted farm when his father died.⁸³ Dealing with the immediate aftermath of the Great War, he described the ensuing 'orgy' of pleasure and debauch of spending, echoed in the columns of *Country Life*, as an understandable reaction to the stress and deprivation of the war years, and the relief, for those who had survived, of coming out of the conflict alive. Among the farming class, rural sports and pastimes re-emerged with a vengeance, and 'we all had money to burn'.⁸⁴ As prices were guaranteed, life was for living again with no thought of the future. So, it was hunting, shooting and fishing, tennis parties and even golf, and the motor car now extended the range and thus the possibilities for what Street describes as swanking. It was a time of plenty and Street recalls that he was able to pay off annually some £500 in those two or three years immediately after the war. The labourer was, to a

⁸² NRO, SC 315b.

⁸³ J. Cherrington writes of Street's background in the introduction to the new edition of A. Street, *Country Calendar* (1935, Oxford, 1986), p. xii-xiii. A. Street, *Farmer's Glory* (London, 1932), pp. 144-6. *CL*, 46, 1181 (23 August 1919), p. 231. A. Howkins, 'Death and rebirth? English Rural Society, 1920-1940', in Brassley, P. *et al*, *The English Countryside between the Wars. Regeneration or Decline?* (Woodbridge, 2006), p. 11.

⁸⁴ Street, *Farmer's Glory*, pp. 145-146.

degree, able to join in this period of extravagance.⁸⁵ His wage had, by the time that the Great War ended, kept level-pegging with the cost of living, while immediately after it outstripped this, reaching 46s in 1921. Street's description of the farming class may have only applied to the owners of larger farms – there was almost certainly a divide between these and the smaller farmer.

Farming during the period of deflation of 1920-1921

In agriculture, it appeared by the start of 1921 that the government was using devious methods to avoid paying the guaranteed wheat price of 95s, but the pages of *Hansard* do not reflect this.⁸⁶ Farmers claimed that they were effectively shut out of the market when prices were good at the end of 1920, then being told on 27 January 1921 that the price was de-controlled and that 95s could no longer be justified, paying instead only 80s.⁸⁷ A delegation from the NFU was granted an audience with the Prime Minister, but the writing was now on the wall for the abolition of guarantees.⁸⁸ When these were proposed in June, the Northamptonshire and Warwickshire branches of the Farmers' Union reported this in an almost matter of fact way, drawing a line under a solution for which farmers had argued. The Leicestershire branch of the Farmers' Union argued limply that they should hold government to its promises, while the Staffordshire branch thought that there was a Machiavellian plot to abolish price guarantees but keep the wages boards.⁸⁹

⁸⁵ Street, *Farmer's Glory*, p. 147.

⁸⁶ B.P.P., HC and HL, search of proceedings late 1920 to February 1921.

⁸⁷ *CL*, 49, 1258 (12 February 1921), p. 176. NRO, ML 3812, Annual General Meeting 22 January 1921.

⁸⁸ NRO, ML 3812, minutes of meetings of 12 February 1921.

⁸⁹ NRO, ML 3812, Annual General Meeting 22 January 1921, minutes of meeting of 18 June 1921. WRO, CR 3157/1/2, minutes of meeting of 9 June 1921. ROLLR, DE 3565/38, minutes of meeting of 11 June 1921. SRO, D 4995/1/1, minutes of meeting of 25 June 1921.

Country Life, however, trumpeted the government's 'moral courage to fling aside their agricultural policy when they found that funds were not sufficient'.⁹⁰ To some, however, this was the 'great betrayal' with the *Sussex Daily News* writing on 23 June 1921 that 'the government's actions [were] one of the most wicked and brutal of its many gross betrayals of the workers of the country'.⁹¹ That paper may have borrowed the term from a 'call to arms' issued by the National Union of Agricultural Workers in the form of a four-page pamphlet in 1921.⁹² Noting in a sub-heading that the government had broken its pledge to agriculture and to farm-workers, it summarised its case in the first nine lines, but the remainder was as one would expect. The Second Reading of the Corn Production Acts (Repeal) Bill in the House of Commons spanned two days in July, and was passed despite considerable opposition.⁹³ Writing later and in autobiographical terms, Adrian Bell felt that:

⁹⁰ *CL*, 49, 1276 (18 June 1921), p. 752.

⁹¹ Penning-Rowsell, 'Who 'betrayed' whom?', pp. 180-181 and reference to the *Sussex Daily News* quote.

⁹² National Union of Agricultural Workers, *The Great Betrayal* (London, undated but 1921).

⁹³ The second reading took place on 4 and 5 July 1921, see B.P.P., HC, 4 July 1921, CXLIV, *Corn Production Acts (Repeal) Bill*, 63-179 and B.P.P., HC, 5 July 1921, CXLIV, *Corn Production Acts (Repeal) Bill*, 249-319. Among the dissenters to the Bill was Mr W. R. Smith (Wellingborough), who was troubled by a Government 'which would guarantee the industry for four years, now prepares to cancel it with scarcely a moment's notice.' He was very exercised about this repeal. 'The land, the most important national asset that we possess, is to be left in the hands of these people. They are to use it as they like; they are not to be called upon to cultivate it properly...All the powers of the county Committees to compel proper cultivation of the soil are being taken away, and we are going to drift back to the old conditions.' Sir Francis Acland (Camborne) and Mr Townley (mid Bedfordshire) were similarly vexed and were among the 113 opponents of the Bill. On the other hand, Capt Fitzroy (Daventry), an agriculturist, said that he had never asked for guaranteed prices and was opposed to them. From Scotland, farmer Mr J. Gardiner (Kinross and West Perthshire) talked about the pernicious effect that guarantees had had in artificially raising the prices of land and its rental value, leading to many farms being bought on the assumption that higher prices would remain. Mr George Edwards (Norfolk, South) declared that this was 'this is the basest betrayal any Government ever committed on any class' and joined the 'No' lobby. The legislation was put in place on 15 August 1921, effective 1 October, see B.P.P., H.C., 15 August 1921, CXLVI, 1020-1067.

...the Corn Production Act's immediate repeal gave [farmers] a taste of political wriggling, but they still thought it was, but a momentary sinking of the prosperous breeze. I too, hoped. For had not I, too, listened to the speeches of 1918? "The agriculture of England must never again be allowed to fall into national neglect".⁹⁴

The potential problems were not restricted to arable. In the middle of 1921, a Royal Commission sat to consider lifting the embargo on the import of Canadian store cattle, a move fiercely resisted by farmers, with those in Warwickshire warning of a serious impact on stock-raising 'during the present slump in prices of stock'.⁹⁵

While *Country Life* had counselled farmers against the expectation of the de-control of wages arguing that, while wages were rising, the Agricultural Wages Board had worked tolerably well, it wondered whether the same would be the case when they started to fall, as inevitably they must.⁹⁶ However, these Boards were swept aside as the Union had warned, together with control of cultivation.⁹⁷ The return to *laissez-faire* policies for agriculture was, however, a return to the relationship between state and agriculture that had existed before the war, and this policy would persist until 1932, with the only major fiscal help given in the meantime being the de-rating of agricultural land in 1929.⁹⁸

It is important to note that the price falls had not been caused primarily by the repeal of the Corn Production Act. Rather, the trigger had been massively expanded overseas

⁹⁴ Bell, *Silver Ley*, pp. 158-159.

⁹⁵ B.P.P., HC, 20 June 1921, CXLIII, 888-889. SRO, D 4995/1/1, minutes of meeting of 26 January 1921. DRO, D 3264/2/1/2, minutes of meeting of 4 February 1921. WRO, CR 3157/1/2, minutes of meeting of 17 October 1921.

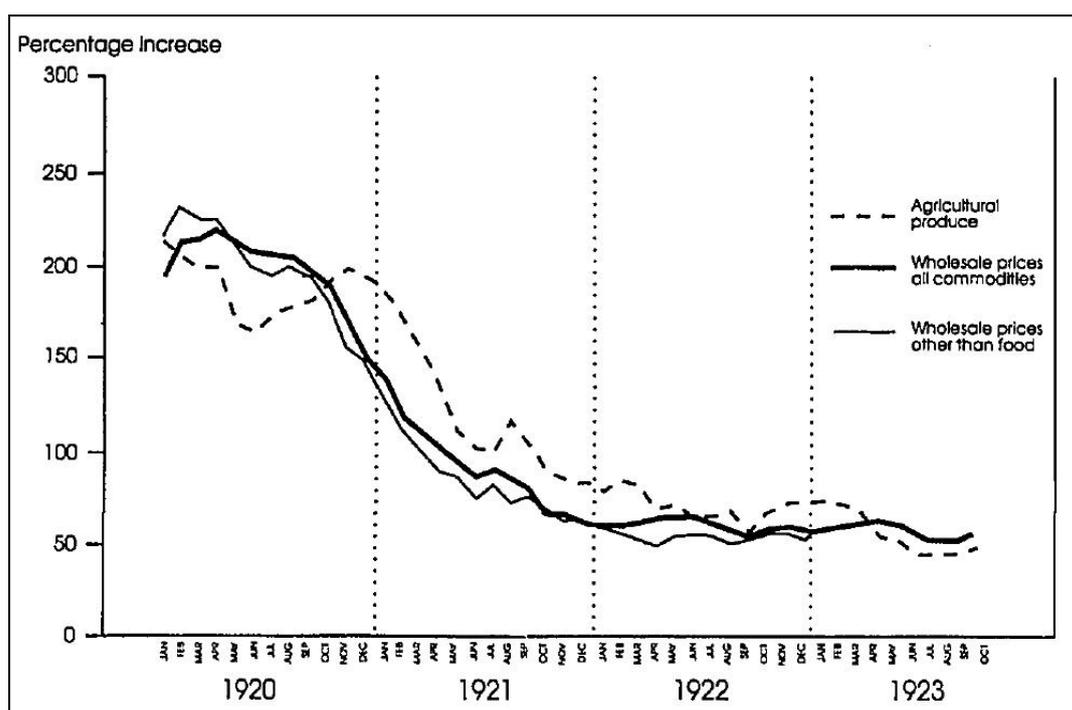
⁹⁶ *CL*, 49, 1276 (18 June 1921), p. 752.

⁹⁷ *CL*, 49, 1278 (2 July 1921), p. 3. *CL*, 49, 1280 (16 July 1921), p. 62.

⁹⁸ Harkness, *War and British Agriculture*, p. 28.

production, a by-product of the war, followed by attempts by governments around the world to deflate their economies. MAF statistics only show annual prices and these are too crude to show precisely when prices started to fall. Work done by Enfield, who studied the 1920-1923 crisis in great detail, showed that the prices of agricultural products had started to fall in May 1920 and then, after a short upturn, fell again at the end of 1920, as shown in Figure 4.10, sourced from his work.⁹⁹

Figure 4.10: *Percentage increase in the prices of agricultural produce, and of wholesale commodities with and without food, from January 1920 to September 1923, compared with the average of the years 1911-1913*



⁹⁹ R Enfield, *The Agricultural Crisis 1920-1923*, p. 94. As Figure 4.10 shows, the price of agricultural products dipped in mid 1920, but then recovered by the year-end. Evidence from Crouch Farm bears this out with the price of wheat and barley still high at the end of 1920. Evidence from a farm at Sibford Ferris in Oxfordshire supports the position for the wheat price, but suggests that the price of oats had fallen by the end of 1920. The price of barley fell through 1921, but wheat may have held up, perhaps as a result of shortages, with the farm at Sibford Ferris achieving a lowered rate of 72s per quarter in March, but then back to the old price of 92/6d in May 1921, before falling to 71s at Crouch Farm in September 1921.

This also shows that, despite these falls, agricultural produce outperformed other wholesale prices in the 1921-1923 period. The drop in prices was recorded by *The Land Union Journal* of February 1922 referring to them as ‘unprecedented’.¹⁰⁰ Between the end of December 1920 and 1921, wheat had fallen from 86/9d per quarter to 45/3d; barley from 72/7d to 44/5d; oats from 42/9d to 28/4d; many graziers had lost £10-£15 per head of cattle after 6 months; there were losses of between £2 and £3 per head of sheep; wool had dropped from 3-4s per pound to 1s or even 6d; while milk prices had held up.

While prices were falling, agricultural wages remained at their 1920 level into 1921, contributing to a huge increase in membership of the National Union of Agricultural Workers.¹⁰¹ On 9 June 1921, two days after the government’s decision to abolish the Wages Board, Warwickshire Farmers’ Union set up a county Conciliation Committee to fix wages and hours. This had 36s per week in its sights, down from the prevailing 46s.¹⁰² The first indication of a fall in wages in Northamptonshire was recorded at the Farmers’ Union County executive meeting at the end of July 1921, when it was reported that workers would accept a drop of four shillings to 4s, while farmers were holding out for 6s reduction.¹⁰³ By October, the negotiating gap was between 36/6d and 40s per week, although farmers in Derbyshire did not want to discuss anything other than a 60- or 65-

¹⁰⁰ Committee of the Land Union ‘The present conditions of agriculture and some of the causes thereof’, *Land Union Journal*, 2.XIX (February 1922), pp 15-21. An extract of this issue of this journal was within the uncatalogued papers at Elton Hall.

¹⁰¹ Penning-Rowsell, ‘Who ‘betrayed’ whom?’, p. 190.

¹⁰² WRO, CR 3175/1/2, minutes of meetings of 9 June 1921 and 7 September 1921.

¹⁰³ NRO, ML 3812, minutes of meeting of 30 July 1921. SRO, D 4995/1/1, minutes of meeting of 23 July 1921.

hour week, although they had to settle for a 54-hour one.¹⁰⁴ A month later the workers' union had accepted the lower rate, only to find that the farmers' aspiration was now 30s, and that many farmers were breaking ranks from the NFU stance and paying this rate.¹⁰⁵ The Farmers' Union was now out of step with farmers, with a proposal to reduce the rate to 33s being rejected at the Northamptonshire Farmers' Union Annual General Meeting in January 1922 in favour of 30s.¹⁰⁶ Farmers cited the cost of living, now lower than it was in July 1918 when the Central Wages Board had fixed 30s, so there was no justification for a rate above this level. The Northamptonshire branch tracked wage rates through the last three months of 1922, with the rate being eventually fixed at 28s.¹⁰⁷

The imbalance between prices and wages probably peaked early in 1922 when agricultural prices had dropped by about half. The red line in Figure 4.11 gives an indication of the national agricultural labourers' wage rate, insofar as one can be defined with so many regional variations.¹⁰⁸ The blue line, however, is factual being based on the wage rate for the highest paid labourer at Gibbard's Crouch Farm, Banbury. This wage rate is referred to throughout this chapter and the next.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁴ NRO, ML 3813, minutes of meeting of 8 October. SRO, D 4995/1/1, minutes of meeting of 22 October 1921. DRO, D 3264/2/1/2, minutes of meetings of 18 November 1921 and 9 December 1921.

¹⁰⁵ NRO, ML 3813, minutes of meeting of 12 November 1921. WRO CR 3157/1/2, minutes of meeting of 15 November 1921.

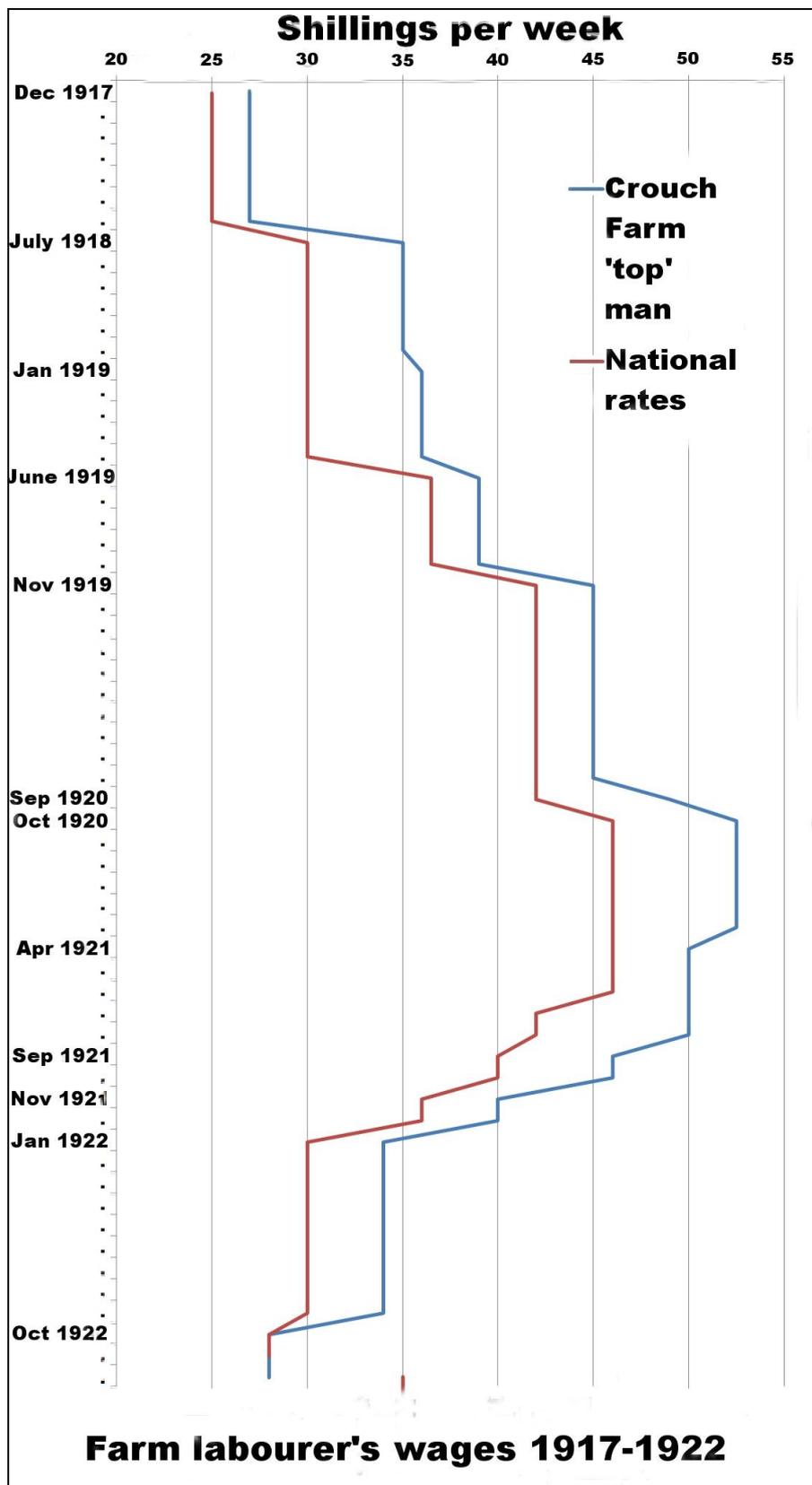
¹⁰⁶ NRO, ML 3813, minutes and AGM of 7 January 1922.

¹⁰⁷ NRO, ML 3814, minutes of meetings of 26 August 1922, 2 September 1922, 23 September 1922, 30 September 1922 and 30 December 1922.

¹⁰⁸ National rates from the end of 1917 to the end of 1919 are based on figures in Green, *A History of the English Agricultural Labourer*, pp. 255-331. F. Green was a member of the Royal Commission on Agriculture of 1919. Wage rates were not the same in all counties, and dates when they were fixed are an estimate, particularly in the period from June 1921 to January 1922, when they fell from 46 to 30s.

¹⁰⁹ From the annual diaries of Crouch Farm.

Figure 4.11: *Deduced national wage rates from Green's work, and those derived from the farm records of Crouch Farm*



At the same time, the decline in arable in the county was accelerating, with a reduction of 402,000 acres in 1921 coming on top of 289,000 acres in 1920 and 90,000 acres in 1919.¹¹⁰ In March 1922 there was a stand-off between milk producers and distributors in Staffordshire, which spread to other districts with farmers unwilling or unable to sell their milk, and this led to acute milk shortages.¹¹¹ Arthur Boscawen, then Minister of Agriculture, intervened and chaired a meeting of National Farmers' Union representatives, among whom was the Staffordshire delegate, Tom Baxter, who was to head the Milk Marketing Board when it was formed 11 years later. The meeting led to the setting up of the Permanent Joint Milk Committee in October 1922, and this laid the foundations for the Board's formation much later in 1933, but not before there had been many more twists and turns in the fortunes of milk. Under the first contract in 1922-1923, liquid milk was sold at 16d per gallon and manufacturing milk 9.6d; in 1931-1932 the prices were just over 13d and 4.75d respectively.¹¹²

Land sales

There were mixed messages coming from the saleroom, with *Country Life* reporting that sales to tenants were holding up at the sales of some estates, but not at others.¹¹³ The Duke of Grafton came back to the saleroom on 4 December 1920, with five farms of between 100 and 350 acres having been sold before the auction, whether to the tenant or not is unknown.¹¹⁴ Two lots of similar size were sold at auction, one to the tenant, and

¹¹⁰ *CL*, 51, 1315 (18 March 1922), p. 360.

¹¹¹ SRO, D 4995/1/1, minutes of meeting of 29 April 1922. DRO, D 3264/2/1/2, minutes of meetings of 18 March and 7 April 1922.

¹¹² *CL*, 51, 1317 (1 April 1922), p. 426. S. Baker, *Milk to Market* (London, 1973), pp. 56, 59, 61.

¹¹³ *CL*, 48, 1251 (25 December 1920), p. 838.

¹¹⁴ NRO, SC 265, G3938/1-2, G3938/5, G3944/2-4.

three after the auction. The average sale price per acre was £29, compared with £22 per acre in 1919, the average years purchase multiplier was 26, compared with 21, and the average rent 22/2d, similar to the 21s per acre of the earlier sale. This suggests that prices had held up here. The main reason for the increase in value compared with sales in 1913 was that rents of this size farm had risen from around 12s to 21s, with the years purchase multiplier not changing significantly. Even if the tenant was the successful bidder, this did not mean that he was the buyer, as beleaguered tenants had embarked on a ruse some months earlier. In the saleroom, they would identify themselves as the tenant effectively saying that “this lot is for the tenant” and this would choke off the competition, allowing them to buy at the lowest price. However, their motive was more devious as they would have a buyer lined up and would pass the sale contract to him for a margin.¹¹⁵

The farmer, particularly the one who had bought at the top of the market in 1919, had probably purchased on the basis of the government’s undertaking to support corn prices. He could not reasonably have seen the twin dangers of falling prices and the big surge in labourer’s wage rates, so he may have felt betrayed particularly if he was forced into bankruptcy by this combination. However, as has already been noted, betrayal did not form any part of the rhetoric of *Country Life* or the Farmers’ Club. Likewise the NFU, which had been formed in 1908, had opposed the continuation of controls in 1920 preferring a complete free market approach so had come out of this change strengthened. Subsequently, Penning-Rowsell has argued that it was a betrayal of the agricultural workers involving as it did the abolition of the Wages Board.¹¹⁶ In consequence, the

¹¹⁵ *CL*, 48, 1234 (28 August 1920), p. 263. *CL*, 48, 1238 (25 September 1920), p. 388.

¹¹⁶ Penning-Rowsell, ‘Who ‘betrayed’ whom?, pp. 176-194. A. Howkins, *The Death of Rural England: A Social History of the Countryside since 1900* (London, 2003), p. 45.

membership of the NUAW went into swift reverse from 120,000 members in 1920 to 47,000 in 1922.¹¹⁷

Anecdotal accounts from farming families who bought after the war

During the course of this research, there were a number of anecdotal accounts of farmers, who had bought their farms immediately after the Great War. While not supported by detailed financial figures, the following five accounts show that many survived despite the odds stacked against them at having bought at such high prices.

The Stafford family had been farming in the Laughton area of Leicestershire since the late 1800s, with the grandfather acquiring, in 1920 or 1921 and from the Church, a farm in Laughton of 150 acres of 'low-grade' land for which they paid £21 per acre.¹¹⁸ A brother was farming 100 acres at that time, so the family were farming 250 acres. The principal farming business was the fattening of c. 200 cattle each year and there were a few (perhaps 20) milking cows as well. There was very little yarding on the farm and this was reserved for the milk herd, so the fattening stock bought at the beginning of the year

¹¹⁷ R. Groves, *Sharpen the Sickle! The History of the Farm Workers' Union* (London, 1959), pp. 170-172.

¹¹⁸ Pers. comm. David Stafford, (27 November 2012). The yardstick for land prices in 1920 comes from Grafton Estate sales where, that year, they ranged from £24 to £35 per acre – with much lower prices the previous year – so £21 per acre for 'low-grade' land was probably a high price at the time of the Stafford purchase. As will be shown later, Gibbard's sales of cattle averaged £33 per head in 1921 and £17 per head in 1922, with purchases at £17 per head in 1923 (but no purchases in 1922), these figures being more in line with the *Land Union Journal* report cited above. Stafford's figure of a £20 per head loss might be accounted for by the fact that the cattle sold were Irish, which had almost certainly cost more due to transportation. The 300 new cattle acquired from the proceeds of the previous year sale were described as 'smaller' beasts, not Irish this time, and this probably accounts for the ability to acquire 300 head for the same money as the sale proceeds of the 200 head of Irish cattle just before. The *Land Union Journal* article already cited suggests that the big drop in prices had occurred by the end of 1921, although this is not supported by Gibbard's sale of 12 head of cattle in November 1921 at £30 per head. Gibbard's figures suggest that the selling price at the end of 1922 and the buying price at the beginning of 1923 were the same.

needed to be sold at the end of it. Alongside the farming activities, a butchery business had been built up as well. Stories of the 1921-1922 period had been passed down through the family when '200 head of cattle were sold at a loss of £20 per head'. However, with the proceeds, it had been possible to buy 300 head of cattle almost immediately. Having just acquired the farm for £3000, the loss on selling the cattle had stretched the family financially but it was apparently not a great issue with the bank. However, it had a severe impact on the indebtedness of the grandfather, and the purchase cost of the farm bought in 1920 or 1921 was not paid off until the early part of the Second World War.

Another farm acquired soon after the Great War was a 241-acre holding in Roade, Northamptonshire. The Roade estate had been included in the first of the major sales by the Duke of Grafton in June 1913, when Sturgess's 241-acre farm on the Grafton Estate failed to sell.¹¹⁹ It was offered again in 1919; was withdrawn when the bidding stopped at £3,000; but was then sold privately for £3,700, which represented 21 years purchase on the rental of £176 (15s per acre).¹²⁰ The purchaser sold on almost at once to Robert Cozens, who came from Gloucestershire on Lady Day 1920 to take the farm, bringing with him his stock and a farmhand. Much needed to be done, the outbuildings and house were in a very poor state, and he was told by the locals that it was poor land only able to yield 5 hundredweight per acre but Cozens set to and pushed the yield to '30-40 hundredweight per acre'.¹²¹ He summarised his approach to farming thus: 'Praper [sic] sowing, praper harvesting; an eye on the weather and t'other on the land; but feed her.

¹¹⁹ NRO, SC 107.

¹²⁰ NRO, SC 233. Pers. comm. Vivian Blyth, Roade Local History Society, (22 February 2012). NRO ZA 6834, Roade Village Scrapbook, pp. 23-27.

¹²¹ These claimed yields seems an exaggeration as, at the time, wheat was yielding around 17 cwt per acre, barley some 15 cwt., and oats around 14 cwt. However, it should not have been a problem to improve the land and increase the yields from 5 cwt.

You can't live without food, no more can't she. Give her back what you takes out.' The farm prospered for five years, despite the difficult period when corn prices fell dramatically, but then there was a setback caused by an outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease. Undeterred it seems, Cozens experimented with different herds and with machinery; became his own mechanic; built his own forge to shoe his five horses; became his own vet; and built up a large dairy herd. His milk round was first delivered from a churn slung between two iron wheels; then milk-carrying bicycles; then a hand-cart; next a horse-drawn float followed by Express Wagons; finally by a motor van as the round grew and covered Roade, Ashton, Stoke Bruerne and Shutlanger. Later the milk was sold to a firm in Northampton. By the time the farm was sold in 1955 after Cozens's death, milking was fully mechanised, five horses had been replaced by five tractors, and the old farmhouse had been modernised.

The third example relates to the purchase of a 147-acre farm by Thomas Naylor, arising out of the break-up of the Bradley Estate in Derbyshire.¹²² Naylor, who had been a 'humble' estate gardener during the Great War, spotted an opportunity when there was a rush of tenants having to vacate their farms as they did not have funds to acquire the freehold. As a result, stock was being sold at auction 'entirely without reserve'.¹²³ Naylor stepped in and traded this on very quickly, making himself enough in one year to fund 30 percent of the £3400 farm cost. This was a dairy farm, but there was insufficient detail for a case-study.¹²⁴ Suffice it to say that his farming enterprise remained successful and that this initiative in 1919 set him up for life.

¹²² Bradley Community Heritage Group, *Bradley; Just another Village?* (Bradley, 2006), pp. 25-29.

¹²³ Bradley Community Heritage Group, *Bradley*, p. 26.

¹²⁴ Pers. comm. Cathy Edge, (10 July 2014).

The next example is thin on detail and the only evidence is that this branch of the Weston family survived the ravages of the early 1920s.¹²⁵ One member of the family, then a tenant of Duke of Grafton at the 226-acre Elms Farm, purchased this at auction for £7250. Another, also as sitting tenant, purchased after auction the 214-acre Moorend Farm also at Yardley Gobion for a sum between £5500-6000.

There was not such a good outcome for the in-laws of the Warren family from the Dunton Bassett area of Leicestershire. Three brothers in the Warren family and five of their in-law brothers bought their farms immediately after the Great War.¹²⁶ Four of the in-law brothers went bust, probably as a consequence of the financial burden, while family members who stayed as tenant farmers all survived the downturn of the 1920s and 1930s. Many of the tenanted farms were rented from Major Hugh Henry Robertson-Aikman and, reportedly, this estate never had any un-let farms throughout the interwar period.

Farms of the large estates

The large estates were also badly affected and, in Chapter 2, pages 35-36, the break-up of some of these was examined in Northamptonshire. The huge disparity between farm incomes and costs, particularly wages, bore heavily on these estates. The effect of this, as *Country Life* reported, was a long list of Northamptonshire country houses which had closed as a result, and these included Althorp, Wakefield Lawn, Fawsley Park,

¹²⁵ NRO, SC 265. NRO, G3944/4, letter of 30 August 1920. Pers. comm. P. Weston, (24 May 2012). Another Weston, but it is not known whether this is the same family, bought a farm in Hartwell ahead of the 1919 auction, see NRO, SC106, SC 233. In order to try and locate farming records from families who bought from the Duke of Grafton, and who still farm today, other known tenant names from the 1919 and 1920 auctions have been unsuccessfully searched from internet and other sources.

¹²⁶ Pers. comm. Wendy Warren, Lutterworth, (29 January 2014).

Cottesbrooke Hall, Castle Ashby and Overstone Park.¹²⁷ Some of these did not survive these difficulties, others reduced their acreage.

Farming in the period of political drift and depression 1922-1925

In agricultural terms, the ‘great betrayal’ of 1921 receives much more attention in the general bibliography of the early 1920s than the depression that followed it. The very sharp re-adjustment of prices and costs, albeit with wage reductions lagging behind the fall in prices, might have been accommodated by the farming community had not dumping of foreign food been taking place at the same time. Perren identified the depression through the rise in bankruptcies and the fall in output and farmers’ incomes, the latter being shown in Table 4.3.¹²⁸

Table 4.3: *Agricultural output and share of farm income, 1920-1939*

	Gross agricultural output (£m at 1911-1913 prices)			Share of farm income (percent)		
	Crops	Livestock	Total Output	Wages	Rent	Farmers’ income
1920-1922	57.81	153.28	211.09	36	16	48
1924-1929	47.56	132.37	179.83	43	24	33
1930-1934	45.23	142.04	187.27	40	23	37
1935-1939	46.83	138.87	185.70	37	19	44

Bankruptcy figures, taken over a longer period, as shown in Figure 4.12, show an almost ‘standard’ level of *c.* 300 *p.a.* with a slight trend line upwards.¹²⁹ There is a peak in 1923 following the period of deflation; slightly better times from 1924-1926; another peak in

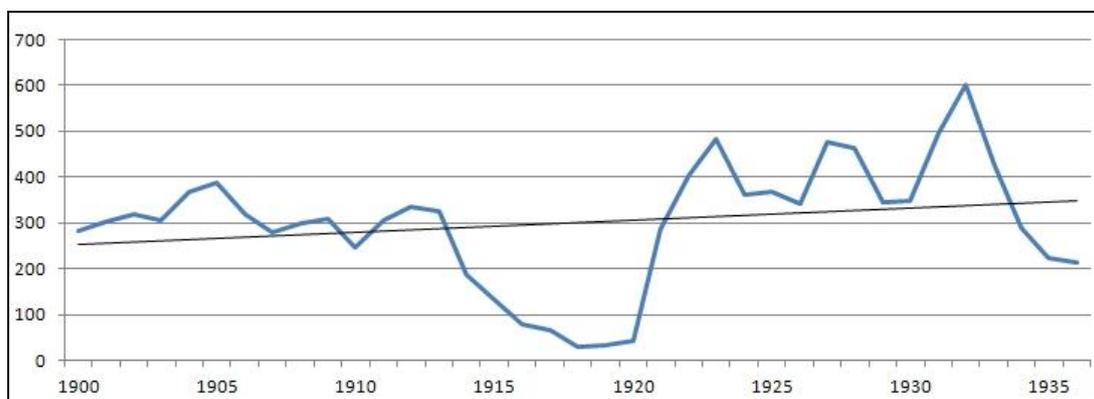
¹²⁷ *CL*, 51, 1310 (18 February 1922), p. 194.

¹²⁸ Perren, *Agriculture in Depression*, pp. 42, 45-46.

¹²⁹ Graph is based on figures from Venn, *The Foundations of Agricultural Economics*, p. 567.

1927 and 1928 followed a return to ‘normal’ levels in 1929 and 1930; and finally a significant peak in 1931-1933.

Figure 4.12: *Farming bankruptcies in England and Wales, 1900-1936*



The taxation of farmers’ incomes had come under the spotlight in 1921 with a proposal to move assessment to Schedule D, the latter requiring financial accounts to be available. Farmers were opposed to this and, at the same time, argued that the basis of assessment should be a single multiplier of the rent or net annual value rather than twice this as introduced during the War.¹³⁰ These assessments were based on valuation lists used originally for the levy of poor rates, and these had led to rateable value being a convenient measure on which to levy Schedule A and Schedule B tax. The rating revaluation of 1922 added to farmers’ woes as it resulted in instances of a 25 percent increase in the amount of tax payable.¹³¹ The absence of information on farm incomes was endorsed by a Farmers’ Union request for audited accounts for the early 1920s.¹³² However, with assessment being retained in Schedule B, there remained no need to have

¹³⁰ SRO, D 4995/1/1, minutes of meeting of 23 April 1921. DRO, D 3264/2/1/2, minutes of meeting of 6 May 1921. SRO, D 4995/1/1, minutes of meeting of 25 March 1922.

¹³¹ WRO, CR 3157/1/2, minutes of meetings of 13 April 1922. B.P.P., HC, 3 August 1922, CLVII, *Property Revaluation*, 1667-8. WRO, CR 3157/1/2, minutes of meeting of 9 November 1922.

¹³² WRO, CR 3157/1/3, minutes of meeting of 13 March 1924.

accounts for tax purposes until the early 1940s, thus explaining the paucity of such accounts.

The 1922-1925 period in detail

As the reins of power were being passed to Bonar Law, the NFU put together its own manifesto for farming, described by *Country Life* as a 'wail and long malediction'.¹³³ Farmers wanted *inter alia* home production safeguarded, presumably via tariffs; local taxation lowered; state credit offered; the cost of postage and railway transport subsidised; and no re-introduction of an agricultural wages board. This was against a backdrop of increasing bankruptcies with *Country Life* commenting that the NFU, while having no constructive suggestions as to the way forward, insisted that 'agriculturists desired to know whether any legislation of a constructive, as distinct from a palliative, character was to be introduced'.¹³⁴ And this from the organisation that fought so hard for agriculture to be left alone!

In 1923 there was a new president of the NFU, and no let-up in the volume of words from *Country Life*, who opined that farmers should concentrate on other types of farming that gave a higher return per man employed such as dairying, intensive pig farming, eggs, vegetables, mechanised grain growing (on easily worked soils), which were particularly suited to the mixed family farm.¹³⁵ They were also concerned that the nationalised railways were holding the industry to ransom as they had done since the depression of the

¹³³ NRO, ML 3814, minutes of meeting of 28 October 1922. *CL*, 52, 1356 (30 December 1922), p. 866.

¹³⁴ *CL*, 52, 1356 (30 December 1922), pp. 866-867.

¹³⁵ *CL*, 53, 1360 (27 January 1923), pp. 100-102. Perren, *Agriculture in Depression*, p. 45-46.

1880s.¹³⁶ In government, there were numerous suggestions as to what should be done including going back to the proposals of the Selborne Report with wages and prices controlled, but this suggestion was ruled ‘impracticable under existing financial conditions’ by the Prime Minister.¹³⁷ Such an idea was strongly opposed in Derbyshire and tossed aside by *Country Life* who thought that the ‘depression through which we are passing is certain to prove of very short duration’.¹³⁸ *Country Life*’s solution, which can have been no more than wishful thinking, was a return to the great landowning class who had stewarded their land unselfishly and with great understanding unlike the officials whom the Labour Government were seeking to establish to control agriculture.¹³⁹

Suddenly there was a brief ray of sunshine on the wages issue with the NFU and the National Union of Agricultural Workers coming together at a joint conference to address some of the issues. Workers’ representatives, it seems, had realised that they and the farmers had many common enemies. Government had also woken up to the clamour about the need for loans to help farmers who had bought between 1917 and 1921, albeit in typical government style, the Agricultural Credits Act of 1923 was proposing that such loans should carry an interest rate of 5 percent as well as amortisation, described by farmers’ leaders as ‘useless’.¹⁴⁰ There were just no solutions to the problems of agriculture, but no shortage of people offering suggestions, not least Sir Charles Fielding, director general of Food Production after the end of the War, who championed increased

¹³⁶ *CL*, 53, 1361 (3 February 1923), p. 132. WRO, CR 3157/1/2, minutes of meeting of 12 April 1923.

¹³⁷ B.P.P., HC, 27 March 1923, CLXII, 251. Lord Selborne’s report, written when he was when he was President of the Board of Agriculture, led to the Corn Production Act of 1917.

¹³⁸ DRO, D 3264/2/1/3, minutes of meeting of 4 May 1923. *CL*, 53, 1377 (26 May 1923), p. 703.

¹³⁹ *CL*, 53, 1381 (23 June 1923), p. 874.

¹⁴⁰ NRO, ML 3814, minutes of meetings of 10 February 1923 and 24 February 1923.

home production, with his case being summarised by the leader writers in *Country Life*, ‘here is a country spending £500m in purchasing foreign food while, at the same time, its number of unemployed is unprecedented and the home producers of food cannot get their goods to market’.¹⁴¹

Fielding further argued that 20 percent of grassland should be broken up; farmers educated to diversify into other products such as pigs, potatoes and sugar beet rather than wheat; the remaining 22m acres of grassland should be improved with an extra one million cows; and railway carriage rates should be reduced. Farmers were not yet ready for the education revolution believing that ‘on the job’ was the only approach, and apparently being disinterested in the emergence of colleges such as Harper Adams.¹⁴² Bonar Law, then Prime Minister, gave his answer to farmers seeking subsidies or protection in the simplest terms ‘*non possumus*’, and *Country Life* opined that this was likely to send agriculture to perdition sooner rather than later.¹⁴³

However, it was not that clear whether farming was in serious trouble or not. The trend of bankruptcies, shown in Figure 4.12 on page 134, had started to decline from its 1922-1923 peak; the index of agricultural products, shown in Figure 4.10 on page 123, had more or less stabilised; wage rates, as shown in Figure 4.11 on page 126, had come back down from their post-war peak; the Agricultural Rates Act of 1923 had halved the contribution made by the land to local rates. The surge in owner-occupation in 1919 and 1920 had come to a halt in 1921, but farms, even in East Anglia, were maintaining their

¹⁴¹ *CL*, 53, 1364 (24 February 1923), pp. 232-233.

¹⁴² WRO, CR 3157/1/2, minutes of meeting of 25 May 1923.

¹⁴³ *CL*, 53, 1368 (24 March 1923), p. 387.

value and there was no shortage of prospective tenants. Venn later concluded that there had been the start of a recovery in agriculture, so there was little reason to have followed the siren calls of *The Times* and others about an impending disaster for British agriculture about to unfold.¹⁴⁴

The dilemma of the state of health of farming also perplexed the members of the 1922 Agricultural Tribunal. This had been set up in December of that year, and its terms of reference had been to compare British agriculture over the last fifty years with other countries with a view to seeing where it may have fallen short. Its task was to propose ways to ‘secure the fullest possible use of the land for the production of food and the employment of labour at a living wage’.¹⁴⁵ Like the recent 1919 Royal Commission and despite the Tribunal only having three members and an assessor (C. S. Orwin), it produced three reports. In view of the improving fortunes of agriculture during its reporting period, it is perhaps not surprising that its findings shifted and were eventually inconclusive. Its first interim report in early 1923 declared that no financial support should be given to wheat growing.¹⁴⁶ The second interim report in mid 1923 was a majority report, with Professor Macgregor dissenting, which recommended a subsidy of 10s for wheat. However, the final report, also a majority report, overturned the subsidy recommendation much to the dismay of farmers. Through the NFU, farmers treated these

¹⁴⁴ Venn, *The Foundations of Agricultural Economics*, pp. 521-525. *The Times* had reported that ‘farmers in all classes, in all districts, are in serious financial straits’. In 1925, a supplement to Agricultural Rates Act of 1923 de-rated farm buildings, and after the other half rate on land was removed in 1929, farmers were left only having to pay rates on their dwelling houses. Thompson., ‘Some indications’, pp. 38-40. S. Sturmev, ‘Owner-farming in England and Wales 1900-1950’, *Essays in Agrarian History, Volume 2*, pp. 286-287.

¹⁴⁵ B.P.P., HC, 11 December 1922, CLIX, 2360-1. J. Venn, ‘The final report of the Agricultural Tribunal of Investigation’, *The Economic Journal*, 34 (1924), p. 398.

¹⁴⁶ Venn, ‘The final report of the Agricultural Tribunal’, pp. 400-401. Venn, *The Foundations of Agricultural Economics*, pp. 399, 522-525.

proposal with disdain to the point that Baldwin became unable to deal with them, and told them that “if you, who have spent your life doing it, cannot tell me how to make arable farming pay, how do you expect me to do it?”¹⁴⁷ Instead he turned for advice to A. G. Street and Horace Plunkett. By September 1923, the Northamptonshire branch of the NFU had realised that government was not going to frame any policies, so set about to try and propose an agricultural policy itself.¹⁴⁸ They argued that there should be a subsidy for arable land of £2 per acre, which would result in extra agricultural employment of 750,000 men, and would increase wheat production by two million quarters, with a saving to the balance of payments of £4m. This was the same Union that, only two years before, had wanted farmers to be left alone to farm as they knew best without any subsidies. The majority final report couched the situation in May 1924 in terms of ‘the present emergency’.¹⁴⁹ It argued that if no protection was offered ‘nothing but the extension of arable dairying and of stock-farming could maintain the tilled area of the country’. Failing either remedy, Britain would have to be content to see its agriculture dwindle. Professor Macgregor’s view was that there was neither a crisis nor an emergency, and part of his concluding comments is quoted at some length:¹⁵⁰

The facts do not show that there is ground for depreciation of British agriculture as a whole. It pays wages that are high as compared with those in other European countries; the yield of the area which is under the chief crops compares favourably with that of the areas under the same crops abroad...The cultivation of the land in Britain cannot be described as inefficient. Considered as a craft, British farming has in its time taught a great deal to other countries; considered as an industrial organisation, it may now learn something in turn.

¹⁴⁷ Cooper, *British Agricultural Policy*, pp. 64-69.

¹⁴⁸ NRO, ML 3815, minutes of meeting of 29 September 1923.

¹⁴⁹ Venn, ‘The final report of the Agricultural Tribunal of Investigation’, pp. 400-1. Venn, *The Foundations of Agricultural Economics*, p. 523.

¹⁵⁰ Venn, *The Foundations of Agricultural Economics*, p. 524

It is clear that none of the major recommendations of the report were implemented. Despite this, Venn considered it to be the most authoritative document on matters rural, and that many subsequent enactments were based on its very comprehensive findings. However, he was critical of work by Orwin who, while illustrating the decline in arable from the 1870s to 1913, had failed to include the statistics up to 1923, which would have produced a very different conclusion. This emphasises the need to carefully choose the period and scope of such surveys, with the same errors perhaps being made by the Farm Economics Branch of the Department of Agriculture at Cambridge University, referred to later on pages 256-259.

There were other issues, not least the agricultural labourers reaction to declining wages, and this led to the labourers' strike of 1923, which started in Norfolk.¹⁵¹ Twenty-five shillings a week was the general rate for farm-workers at the beginning of 1923, and it was freely admitted that this was the lowest relative rate 'in the memory of living man'. The impending dispute was probably more between the farmers and government, using the workers as the pawns. In mid March about 500 workers had walked out and later in that month, the Union called the men out across Norfolk with, at one stage, an estimated 10,000 men on strike. It was the 'biggest battle since the great lock-out of 1873', with both sides seeing the result as key to the rest of the country. Staffordshire farmers voted to 'render all assistance', and in Northamptonshire, the Daventry branch of the Farmers' Union heaped all the blame on the government for failing to help farmers, and tried unsuccessfully to force a motion through the County executive to the effect that farmers

¹⁵¹ Groves, *Sharpen the Sickle!*, pp. 176-205.

should lay down their land in protest and move to a system of ranch farming.¹⁵² On 18 April, a settlement was reached in Norfolk at 25s for a 50-hour week with overtime for the next four hours being paid at the higher rate of 6d per hour, and the workers agreeing to accept this on the basis that there was no victimisation of strikers.¹⁵³ This is where the real problems emerged with different interpretations of ‘no victimisation’, particularly as some farmers were refusing to take back some of the men who had gone on strike. So the workers ‘victory’ in resisting the farmers’ attempt to make bad conditions worse ended as a hollow one with over 1000 men still unemployed by July, resulting in many being evicted from their homes. While there was pain locally, the farmers’ movement to cut wages was halted across the country. Initially, the strike had stopped wages falling, but over the next 18 months or so, wages moved up as was shown in Figure 3.13 on page 70. The timing of this can be seen in greater detail from the day books of Gibbard of Crouch Farm which suggest that this uptrend occurred in the first three months of 1925. It was this that took the gloss off the improving fortunes of farming.

This was not the only problem to affect farmers adversely, with foot-and-mouth disease having broken out in the south in November, spreading to Northamptonshire via Rugby market in February 1924.¹⁵⁴ This continued on-and-off through into 1926 and, although serious, was never at the extreme levels seen early in the 1880s, when 4941 outbreaks

¹⁵² SRO, D 4995/1/2, minutes of meeting of 27 March 1923. NRO, ML 3814, minutes of meeting of 28 April 1923.

¹⁵³ Groves, *Sharpen the Sickle!*, pp. 176-205.

¹⁵⁴ NRO, ML 3815, minutes of meeting of 9 February 1924. WRO, CR 3157/1/3, minutes of meetings of 14 February and 13 March 1924.

were reported in 1881 and an incredible 16,354 in 1883. Graphs for the interwar years are shown in Figures 4.13 and 4.14.¹⁵⁵

Figure 4.13: *Number of outbreaks of foot-and-mouth across the country, 1919-1942*

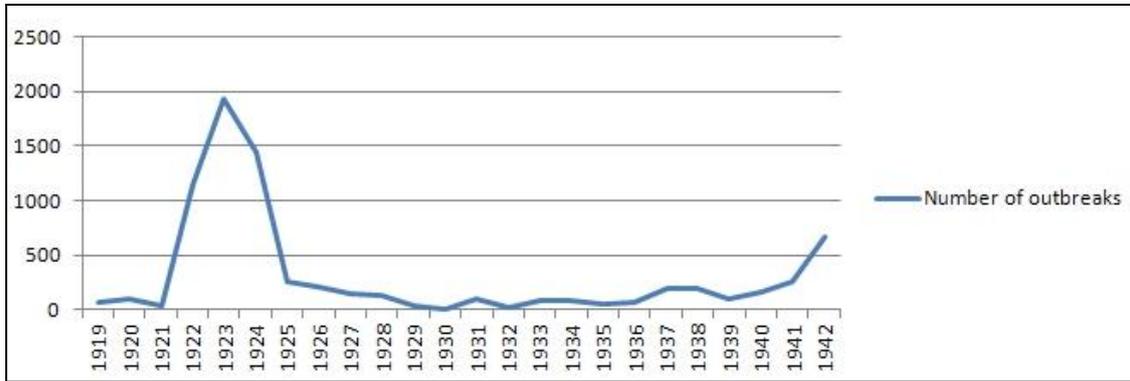
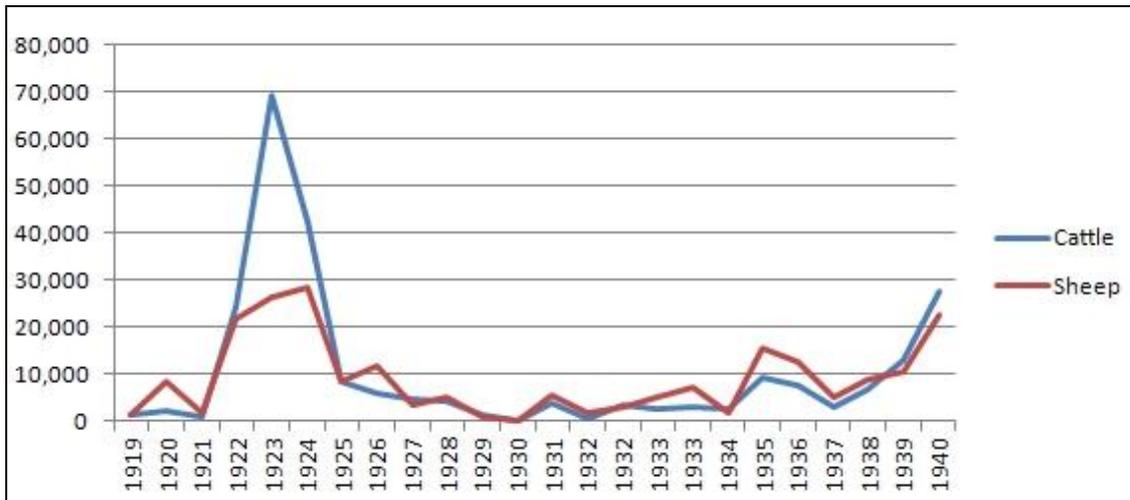


Figure 4.14: *Number of cattle and sheep affected by foot-and-mouth disease, 1919-1940*



None of these issues was serious enough to reverse the reducing bankruptcy rate, shown in Figure 4.12, page 134, instead just creaming off farmers' improving profits. Through 1924 and 1925, *Country Life* had no longer tried to lead the debate as to the solution to agriculture's problems. Instead, its leader writers continued with occasional exasperated

¹⁵⁵ Graphs created by the author from Defra, 'Foot and mouth disease outbreak statistics', <http://archive.defra.gov.uk/foodfarm/farmanimal/diseases/atoz/fmd/about/stats.htm> [accessed 17 October 2012].

outpourings of frustration as to why we could not produce our own food whereas other countries seem better able to; why dairying had not expanded more; why ‘obsolete’ wheat farming continued despite the ‘immense new tracts of land overseas’; and then, with the solution apparently so obvious:

Surely it ought to be within the reach of men of common sense to arrange that the food we buy from abroad should be grown at home! There is little doubt that it could be grown profitably. More, instead of less, stock should be kept on the land and the plough used for the purpose of providing food for it. Far better pay the ploughman than the cake merchant!¹⁵⁶

Apparently the leader writer and his staff had all the answers, railing against the proposed re-establishment of Wages Boards and county committees to promote good husbandry, replacing bad tenants with skilled managers. Why, he had asked, when we used to be in the forefront of agricultural progress, were we now lagging behind, having been overtaken by Germany, Belgium, Denmark, Australia, Canada, America and Russia. Even before the last crisis in agriculture has passed, *Country Life* saw a new one dawning, with no profit in arable, and certainly no money to pay higher wages.¹⁵⁷

Ramsay MacDonald had appointed Noel-Buxton as his Minister of Agriculture, and his first speech of note confirmed the non-interventionist role of government, with Buxton expressing the use of common sense rather than ‘nostrums’.¹⁵⁸ Ramsay MacDonald appears to have sided with the view of Professor Macgregor and considered that agriculture was recovering; that prices were stable; that bankruptcies were now much lower; and that there was a high demand for farms, supported by renewed activity in the saleroom in the middle of 1924. Although it had removed its support for agriculture and

¹⁵⁶ *CL*, 55, 1414 (9 February 1924), pp. 188-189.

¹⁵⁷ *CL*, 55, 1415 (16 February 1924), p. 228.

¹⁵⁸ *CL*, 55, 1423 (12 April 1924), p. 556. *CL*, 56, 1442 (23 August 1924), p. 308.

agricultural wages, the government, was not entirely non-interventionist, and the re-introduction of the Wages Boards was considered in April 1924, but not pursued, opposed by the leader writer of *Country Life* and the Northamptonshire and Warwickshire branches of the National Farmers' Union.¹⁵⁹ The problems of the local milk industry continued to fester, with the local branches of the National Farmers' Union declaring that this had reached crisis point in September 1924.¹⁶⁰ The distributors had demanded a 2d per gallon reduction and the farmers were threatening to hold up supplies until a new price was agreed. These stand-offs seemed an eternal aspect of the milk industry, but a settlement was reached in October 1924.¹⁶¹ On the arable front, forecasts for the harvest of 1924 were as changeable as the weather with the rains of August and September eventually putting paid to the optimism of a bumper crop.¹⁶² Despite this, and 'despite the depression in agriculture', *Country Life* reported that demand for land was keen, with landowners offering to tenants ahead of auction and, in one example from Somerset, 37 percent of such lots were sold to the occupying tenant, so owner occupation was on the increase again.¹⁶³ Noel-Buxton opined that the outlook for farmers was now more cheerful than at any time since 1921, but this seems rather a statement of the obvious given the recent upheavals.¹⁶⁴

¹⁵⁹ NRO, ML 3815, minutes of meeting of 26 April 1924. WRO, CR 3157/1/3, minutes of meetings of 23 April and 12 June 1924. *CL*, 55, 1425 (26 April 1924), p. 637. *CL*, 56, 1437 (19 July 1924), p. 82.

¹⁶⁰ DRO, D 3264/2/1/2, minutes of meetings of 5 and 12 September 1924. SRO, D 4995/1/2, minutes of meeting of 6 September 1924. NRO, ML 3815, minutes of meetings of 13 September 1924.

¹⁶¹ NRO, ML 3815, minutes of meetings of 4 October 1924.

¹⁶² *CL*, 56, 1448 (4 October 1924), p. 499.

¹⁶³ *CL*, 56, 1446 (20 September 1924), pp. 423 and 454. *CL*, 56, 1545 (15 November 1924), p. 777.

¹⁶⁴ *CL*, 56, 1448 (4 October 1924), p. 499.

In the lead-up to the general election at the end of 1924, the Northamptonshire branch of the National Farmers' Union had yet again embarked on trying to tie candidates down to pledges on agricultural policy, but most appear to have hedged their bets. Baldwin managed to enlist Viscount Bledisloe as Parliamentary Secretary to assist Edward Wood, his Minister of Agriculture.¹⁶⁵ Bledisloe wanted the government to follow the Danish system of owner occupation which, he argued, would bring one million acres back under arable by intensive tillage based on the foundation of arable dairying and livestock, rather than artificially boosting wheat production. This idealistic scheme would establish state-supported smallholders, but the Small Holdings Act of 1926 paved the way only for small garden sites and allotments. Cooper concluded that 'rather than create a new class of yeoman farmers, Baldwin and Wood had put the final nail in the coffin of agrarianism'.¹⁶⁶ While Lord Ernle made this siren call:

British agriculture is not a cheerful topic; on the contrary, it is gloomy and depressing...Corn growing is on the rocks; its S.O.S signals are flying in all directions; no lifeboats are as yet in sight...Our home market for agricultural produce, which should be the best and most stable in the world, is...the profitable plaything of foreign producers.¹⁶⁷

Farming after the Gold Standard was restored in 1925

The Northamptonshire, Warwickshire and Derbyshire branches of the National Farmers' Union had little of substance to say throughout 1925, although they all revisited the issue of whether farming should be left alone to work out its own salvation; should be in receipt of subsidies; and if these were forthcoming whether farmers would guarantee

¹⁶⁵ NRO, ML 3815, minutes of meetings of 18 October and 25 October 1924.

¹⁶⁶ Cooper, *British Agricultural Policy*, pp. 69-71.

¹⁶⁷ Lord Ernle, *The Land and its People* (London, n.d), p. 216 quoted in Horn, *Rural Life in England*, p. 209. The quote is believed to have been made in 1925.

increased areas under the plough as well as employing more workers. The Northamptonshire executive were sent away to consider this, but the matter was never referred to in later meetings, so it seems to have been a rhetorical question, while Warwickshire and Derbyshire resolved in favour of no interference or subsidies.¹⁶⁸ *Country Life* had another nostalgic look back at better times in farming under the ‘great and benevolent’ landowners, urging that the ‘disastrous dispersal of large estates’ be checked, and pinning the blame on Death Duties, Income Tax and Supertax.¹⁶⁹ Having killed the golden goose, Lloyd George denounced the current system of land tenure as ‘vicious and unbusinesslike’ declaring that the only solution was state ownership, a view which was surprisingly supported by Orwin of the Institute of Agricultural Economics at Oxford, albeit it seems that he felt that there was no other way out of these difficulties.¹⁷⁰ Meanwhile the think-tank of the Council of Agriculture for England had come up with an eight-point plan, which was more of a wish list, although the editor of *Country Life* was impressed.¹⁷¹ Education and research should be improved; small holdings encouraged; the system of agricultural credit improved; there should be better marketing and transport; prices should be steadied; tax on land should be lightened; more land should be drained; and land should be limed.

¹⁶⁸ NRO, ML 3816, minutes of meeting of 25 April 1925. WRO, CR 3157/1/3, minutes of meeting of 30 April 1925. DRO, D 3264/2/1/4, minutes of meeting of 1 May 1925. The records of the Staffordshire branch are missing.

¹⁶⁹ *CL*, 57, 1474 (4 April 1925), p. 502. *CL*, 57, 1475 (11 April 1925), p. 544.

¹⁷⁰ *CL*, 58, 1501 (10 October 1925), p. 531.

¹⁷¹ *CL*, 58, 1499 (26 September 1925), p. 454. Separate Councils of Agriculture for England and Wales were set up by the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries Act of 1919 to advise the Board of Agriculture and Fisheries.

By the middle of 1926, it was accepted by government that farming was now unprofitable.¹⁷² With Walter Guinness as Minister of Agriculture, a White Paper was brought forward which again rejected any agricultural protection or subsidy:

...no case has been made on defence grounds which would justify the expenditure necessary to induce farmers in time of peace to produce more than economic considerations dictate...None of these schemes could make the country self-supporting as regards bread stuffs except at an impossible cost.¹⁷³

Government had a policy of increasing food output and employment for as many people as possible; but had no suggestions on how these aims were to be achieved! However, with the decline in prices of arable products, government encouraged farmers away from arable to meat and milk. However, there were other issues facing graziers, and these related to the so-called Meat Trusts, whose dominance had first been raised in the House of Commons in 1917 and would be again in 1928.¹⁷⁴ It appears that these Trusts were deliberately reducing supply such that the average price of chilled meat on Smithfield Market for the week ending 15th June, 1928 had been £10 per ton higher than for the corresponding week in 1927. This had resulted in an inter-county conference being called in late 1926. This reported that one of the prevalent practices was the import of Canadian cattle ready for slaughter, which it proposed should be outlawed. The local branch also noted that butchers were not encouraging the sale of English meat, so there were many market considerations affecting the graziers' trade.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷² *CL*, 60, 1542 (7 August 1926), p. 192.

¹⁷³ Harkness, *War and British Agriculture*, pp. 29-30.

¹⁷⁴ Brassley, 'British farming between the wars', pp. 190-191. B.P.P., HC, 22 February 1917, XC, *Colonial cattle-raising lands*, 1443. B.P.P., HC, 12 July 1928, CCXIX, *Meat Prices*, 2453. The Prime Minister had pledged in 1917 to limit imports of cattle, and farmers often reminded his successors of this and to investigate Meat Trusts, for example Warwickshire Farmers' Union, CR 3157/1/2, minutes of meetings of 13 July and 12 October 1922.

¹⁷⁵ WRO, CR 3157/1/3, minutes of meeting of 10 September 1925. NRO, ML 3817, minutes of meetings of 30 October 1926 and 6 November 1926.

The Northamptonshire NFU branch established a special committee to consider the agricultural depression and this met on 2 March 1927, but the minutes of this are missing, so reliance has to be placed on the summary in the minutes a month later.¹⁷⁶ This highlighted the issue of wages which the branch reported to be 128 percent above pre-war levels, almost exactly in line with the increase in the top labourer's rate at Crouch Farm from 15s to 34s.¹⁷⁷ On the other hand, agricultural products at 49 percent above pre-war levels were more or less in line with national statistics. Despite favourable amendment of the Agricultural Rates Act 1923 in 1926, further rating relief was to be sought; action on wheat growing should be taken by government 'if a calamity to the nation is to be averted'; and an extension to the Agricultural Credits Act of 1923 was required to bring all farms bought up to the end of 1925 into its scope.¹⁷⁸ The chief point from this special committee referred to the difficulties facing graziers with prices forced down by the great American Meat Trusts, such that 'following five years of continuous losses, the grazier is faced with the most difficult situation the industry has ever known'. This situation was endorsed by *Country Life* noting that the farmer who had moved from corn to grass now found himself in a worse plight with hay that could not be sold, and beef and mutton prices depressed which could only spell heavy losses.¹⁷⁹

In reflecting on 1926, the leader writer of *Country Life* referred to it as 'no year since 1893 so disastrous as 1926' with corn 'a grievous disappointment'; sheep reduced in value by £1 per head during the year; the position of beef cattle was even worse; a milk

¹⁷⁶ NRO, ML 3817, minutes of meeting of 5 March 1927.

¹⁷⁷ Information from Crouch Farm diaries for 1914 and 1927.

¹⁷⁸ NRO, ML 3817, minutes of meeting of 5 March 1927.

¹⁷⁹ *CL*, 61, 1577 (9 April 1927), p. 547.

surplus driving the price down; but pigs and poultry remained unaffected.¹⁸⁰ Against this dire situation, the market in farms and land described prices as ‘excellent’, and 1927 opened on an optimistic footing, and remained ‘in a very active state’ despite the adverse agricultural conditions as the year progressed.¹⁸¹ Farmer ownership in 1927 had now reached 36 percent, compared with 11 percent in 1914.¹⁸² While many of the wealthiest landed families had gone to the saleroom to rationalise their estates, nevertheless most were still in possession of their country seats. Stevenson considered that paradoxically the break-up of some of these estates had helped to perpetuate the landed class. The trend of wealth moving away from landed property had been firmly established. In the 1880s, some 50 percent of the country’s wealth had been in land, while by the 1930s this had reduced to about one-sixth with fortunes made in food, drink and tobacco, commerce and finance now predominating.

The trends shown for the prices of individual corn prices and livestock were picked up by *Country Life* at varying dates, with the leader writer having noted in August 1927 that there were signs of livestock prices on the wane.¹⁸³ However, as was shown in Figures 4.6 and 4.7 on page 101, this dip was a temporary one with prices recovering a year later in 1928. More of concern, it was noted from visits to farms that cropping was then being determined by the immediate needs to make money rather than wise husbandry, and that

¹⁸⁰ *CL*, 60, 1561 (18 December 1926), p. 983. *CL*, 61, 1564 (8 January 1927), p. 40.

¹⁸¹ *CL*, 61, 1580 (30 April 1927), p. 698. *CL*, 61, 1584 (28 May 1927), p. 862.

¹⁸² J. Stevenson, *British Society 1914-45* (Harmondsworth, 1984), pp. 333-6. According to Sturmeay, the variation in the extent of owner-occupation after 1927 is unknown with the only figures available, for 1927 and 1941, suggesting that it declined over this period, see N. Buxton, *House of Commons Debates*, 5s., Vol. 169, Col. 1130, 1924, cited in Sturmeay, ‘Owner-farming in England and Wales’, pp. 294-9.

¹⁸³ *CL*, 62, 1597 (27 August 1927), p. 282.

fixed rotations were being abandoned. A divide in the rhetoric opened up between *Country Life* and the NFU. The latter spent much of its energy in trying to force government into protectionist measures for agriculture, this typified at the local level in the summer of 1927, when the Northamptonshire branch called two of its Members of Parliament to a conference on 16 July 1927. These were Hon. E. A. Fitzroy, who represented South Northants, and Sir Mervyn Manningham-Buller, who represented Daventry.¹⁸⁴ The long list of issues raised by the Northampton branch included the high interest paid on farm purchases; the fall in farm values; huge imports of meat and tinned milk; the hopeless position of cereal growers; and the imbalance of agricultural prices up 42 percent over pre-war levels compared with cost of production 100 percent higher and wages 120 percent higher. When the local executive met to debate this on 3 September, they resolved that government be pressed to prohibit imports of foreign flour and skimmed milk; to tax imported meat; and to ‘take all measures in law necessary to restore agriculture to a more prosperous state’.¹⁸⁵ Warwickshire and Derbyshire Farmers’ Unions were ploughing similar furrows, with the latter calling their local MPs to meet them, but reporting negative outcomes from this. *Farmer and Stockbreeder* had reportedly urged the NFU to bring forward its own policies and to stop Baldwin wriggling out of his agricultural policy promises.¹⁸⁶ *Country Life*’s columns were critical of the NFU for not putting their energies into constructive proposals to regenerate agriculture. The establishment of well-organised co-operatives was to be the panacea to the problem of the big margin between retail and farm prices. In June 1928, *Country Life* noted that the NFU had finally come to its senses in changing tack from a campaign of protectionism,

¹⁸⁴ NRO, ML 3817. Report of conference on 16 July 1927.

¹⁸⁵ NRO, ML 3817. Minutes of meeting of 3 September 1927.

¹⁸⁶ WRO, CR 3157/1/4, minutes of meetings of 8 June, 14 July and 10 August 1927. DRO, D 3264/2/1/5, minutes of meetings of 3 June, 1 July and 4 November 1927.

which was never going to hold sway with government, to looking seriously at marketing reforms and encouraging farmers to set up co-operatives.¹⁸⁷ Government had now taken steps, via the Agricultural Credits Act 1928, to provide sources of agricultural credit for farmers, and were poised to exempt agricultural land and buildings from rates, this following in 1929.¹⁸⁸ However, in a move heavily criticised by the Central Landowners' Association, this former was not to be achieved by direct government loans, rather by nine participating banks setting up a central mortgage institution. However a 'curiously worded' clause inserted in the Act had the effect that the participating banks were instructed not to lend money to any farmer who had substantial loans at August 1928. With the parlous state of agriculture, and most farmers borrowed up to the hilt, it was not surprising that this scheme was totally ineffective.

Research by Cambridge University

As referred to on pages 12-14 in Chapter 1, the Farm Economics Branch of the Department of Agriculture at Cambridge University had produced reports for the period 1923-1929. As already noted on page 13, different farms were chosen for each year and, this lack of continuity of source material, compromised the trend significance. Nevertheless, these suggest that there was a downturn in 1926, as shown in Figure 4.15.¹⁸⁹ The Cambridge series of investigations ceased after Report 17 which covered up to year 1928-1929.

¹⁸⁷ *CL*, 62, 1605 (22 October 1927), p. 580. *CL*, 63, 1639 (16 June 1928), p. 882.

¹⁸⁸ L. Minty, 'The Agricultural Credits Act, 1928', *The Economic Journal*, 40 (1930), pp. 249-258.

¹⁸⁹ *DOA*, University of Cambridge, *An Economic and Financial Analysis*, various dates. Graph prepared by author. 1923-1924 figures are derived from Report 1; 1924-1925 figures from Reports 2 and 3; 1925-1926 from Report 4; 1926-1927 from Reports 6, 8 and 10; 1927-1928 and 1928-1929 from Report 17.

Figure 4.15: *Average cash return per farm from the Cambridge University Economics Branch study, 1924-1929*



What farmers did not know about this second downturn was that this was a mere warm-up to what to unfold in the first half of the 1930s, following the collapse of commodity prices in 1929.

Introduction to farm accounts

Before coming on to an analysis of farm accounts from the case-study farms researched for this thesis, one example, which under-pins the difficulties of 1921-1923 comes from a report in *Country Life*. This related to James Ismay's farm at Iwerne Minster in Dorset.¹⁹⁰ The farm was a large one of 1318 acres of which 579 acres were pasture, 523 acres arable, and 216 acres downland for sheep grazing. Archibald Bridges of the Agricultural Economics Institute of Oxford described it as a 'good farm' intelligently maintained, nevertheless the farm made losses as shown in Table 4.4.

¹⁹⁰ *CL*, 56, 1444 (6 September 1924), p. 346. A. Bridges *et al*, *Iwerne Minster Home Farm Cost Accounts* (Oxford, 1924).

Table 4.4: *Losses at James Ismay's farm at Iwerne Minster, 1921-1923*

Year to 29 September	Total loss	Loss from cattle operations ¹⁹¹
1921	5545	3413
1922	966	1128
1923	498	2284
TOTAL	7009	6825

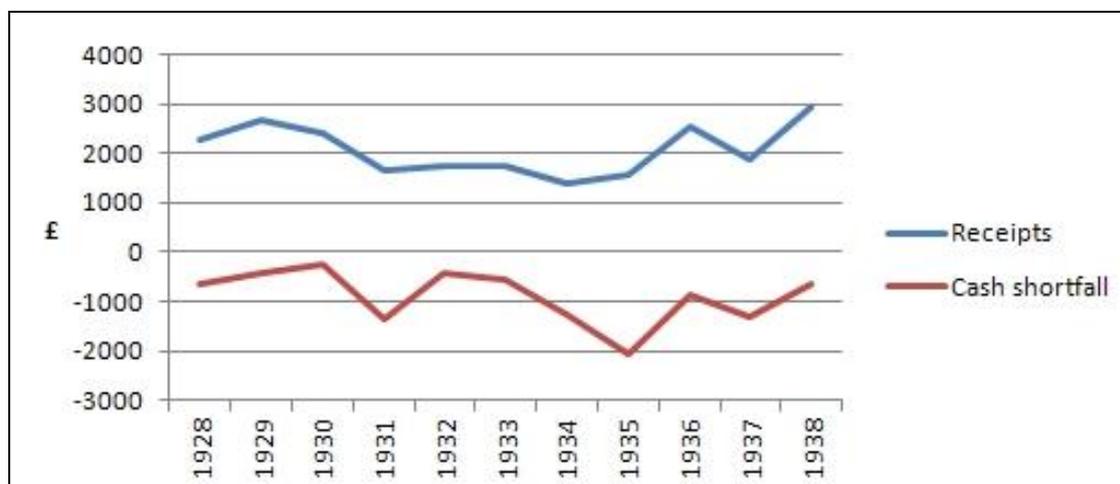
While very detailed figures are given for the sheep holding, with little change in their valuation as at Michaelmas 1920-1922, it is disappointing that this 'model' exercise of cost accounting failed to deliver detailed figures for the three years for cattle, where most of the answers probably lay. Bridges reported, in the text, on cattle sales for the three years to Michaelmas, but these figures did not feature in the summary profit and loss accounts which, for cattle, merely show losses for this 'department' without any back-up figures as these were 'not sufficiently analysed'. Given the very precise results (to the nearest penny), it is most unfortunate that this detail is absent as it does not enable the researcher to draw other than general conclusions from this rare and much vaunted example of how a farmer should account. Further, but speculative, analysis here suggests that Ismay's cattle stock value fell by some £3400 at Michaelmas 1922 as a result of the cattle head price falling from £100 to £77; that he reduced his cattle stock by around 30 units between Michaelmas 1922 and 1923 resulting in a further fall of some £1100, at which point the cattle were probably significantly over-valued with an unchanged per-head price of £77; and that a further devaluation of some £2300 had occurred by Michaelmas 1924 when the per-head price was only £37. The total cattle stock loss of £6800 almost squares with the overall loss over the three years of £7000. So, as has been seen elsewhere, Ismay sold down his cattle, to the extent of some £5000 in year 1921-1922, to create cash flow during this difficult deflationary period. By Michaelmas 1924,

¹⁹¹ These figures have been derived by the author, see text below the Table.

he had built his herd numbers back to earlier levels, whether by purchase or an increased level of calving is not clear. These figures do not, however, give any indication as to whether things were improving by 1924.

It is also opportune to strike a note of caution about analysis of contemporary accounts from this period. A local history publication from the year 2000, resulting from searches at the Oxford History Centre, led to a visit to a farm at West Hagbourne, near Didcot.¹⁹² The single book recorded receipts and expenditures from 1 April 1927 to the beginning of the Second World War. At each year end (31 March) there was a summary of the figures for the year. Transcription of these show losses for every year, and the scale of the cumulative losses were at levels that no bank would have continued to support the operation, as shown in Figure 4.16.

Figure 4.16: *Financial details of farming at York Farm, West Hagbourne*



Fortunately, there was a great niece who had researched the family extensively. One of the farms was close to Didcot, and over the years from 1919 through to the 1930s, many building plots were sold. Also the niece advised that the family were selling significant

¹⁹² W. Hakeborne, *The Story of West Hagbourne* (Hagbourne, 2000). Pers. comm. Richard Allen and Jillian Hedges, (12 December 2012 and subsequent).

numbers of trees to a saw-mill, so clearly there was also a plantation, which was possibly being progressively cleared. Nevertheless the raw statistics of the farming operation paint a very bleak picture. By comparison with other farming operations, it seems likely that the account book was recording an operation of *c.* 450 acres, with a workforce of some 11 men costing just short of £1000 *p.a.*. There was an arable content of *c.* 100 acres, and as well as fattening and dairy cattle and sheep, pigs were also being kept. Figure 4.16 may or may not show the true picture, but this study shows the danger of accepting accounting information at face value.

Farm accounts for the period 1919-1928

As would be expected, the case-studies do not fit neatly into the distinction between the two chapters outlined at the beginning of this chapter. In this section, an operation which continues into the 1930s has its main profit trend graph shown for the whole interwar period. Other trends, shown in this chapter and the next, have overlaps between the two periods.

With the very large number of Figures used in this thesis, maps are not always provided, particularly where the village or farm locations can be easily related to major conurbations. Where such maps are shown, these have been prepared by the author from a variety of internet sources, commonly Google maps, Google Earth and Bing maps. All the graphical material showing trends in the farming operations has been prepared by the author from the records available. The span of years does not always cover the precise split between this chapter and the next, with often an overlap so that the continuation of a trend can be seen. In this chapter and the next, the individual studies are organised into a sequence which first looks at those farms which have a more or less continuous record

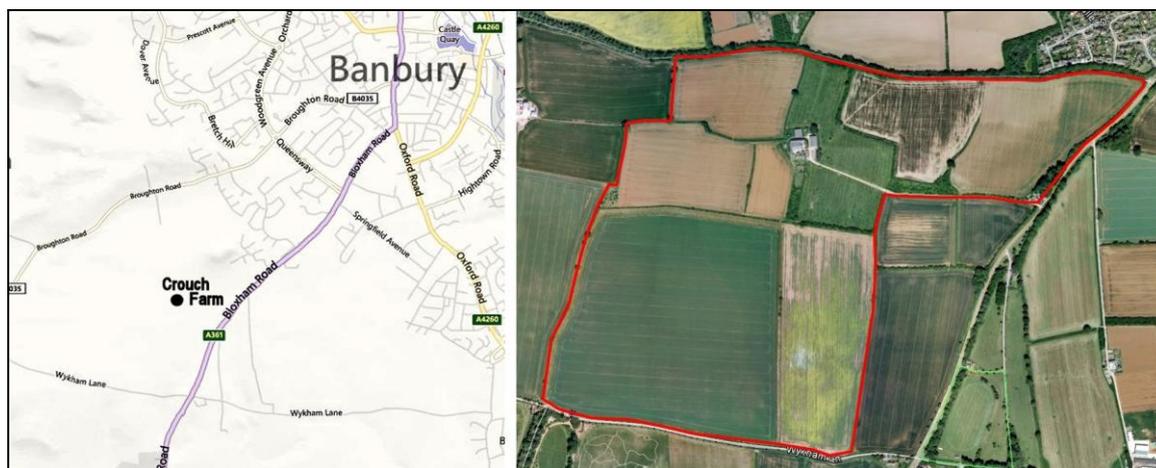
for the entire interwar period and which are examined in both chapters. Then those that only cover the period up to around 1931 or earlier are recorded in this chapter, or from 1929 and through the 1930s in the next.

With 21 farms studied in this chapter, with most having a location map and some a photograph, and with each requiring at least one Figure to show its farming performance, there are, of necessity, a large number of Figures in the detailed section which follows, as well as in Chapter 5. The records of Crouch Farm are believed to be almost unique and provide insights, not found elsewhere, into the *minutiae* of farming in the interwar period, with 24 Figures for this farm between the two chapters.

Crouch Farm, Bloxham Road, Banbury, Oxfordshire

Crouch Farm is located, as shown in Figure 4.17, to the south-west of Banbury, now only just beyond its urban creep down the A361 Bloxham Road. The farmhouse, shown in Figure 4.18, is a Grade II listed late seventeenth-century ironstone building.¹⁹³

Figure 4.17: *Location of Crouch Farm*



¹⁹³ <http://www.imagesofengland.org.uk/Details/Default.aspx?id=244291> [accessed 7 April 2013]. English Heritage, listing number SP4361438858.

Figure 4.18: *View of Crouch Farmhouse from the south*

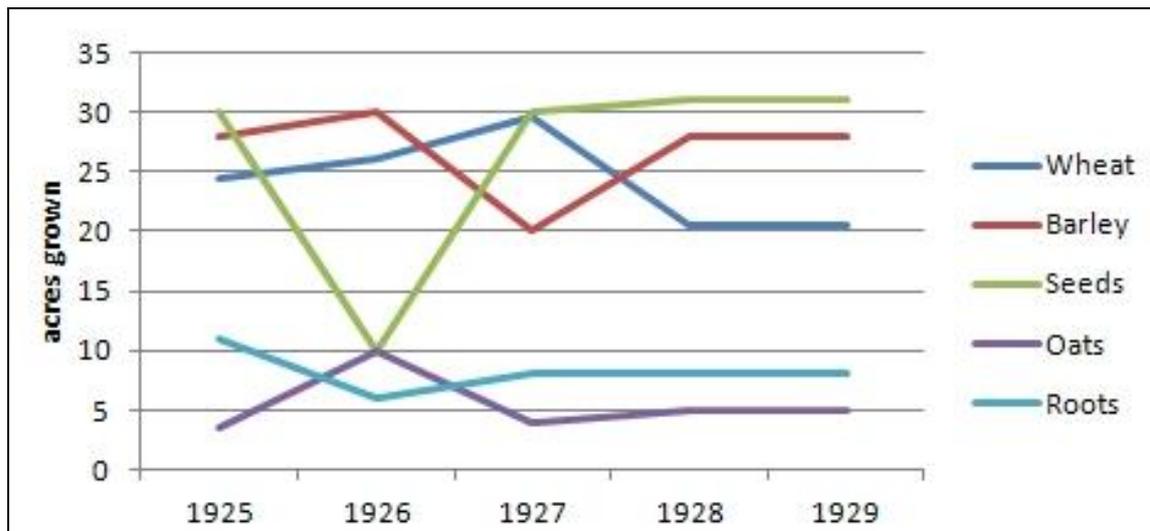


The Gibbard family started farming here on 25 March 1883 and they farmed continuously until 2009, with a complete set of farming diaries from the middle of 1910 until 2008.¹⁹⁴ It was always run as a mixed farm, but never with any dairy, and was originally 165 acres. From 1925-1929, there are references to figures for the 4 June Return, with these written on the interleaved blotting paper, and showing that arable was maintained at 98 acres arable with 65½ acres grass, the balance being presumably the house and garden. The acreages are shown in Figure 4.19.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹⁴ Gibbard diaries 1910-1942, deposited by the Gibbard family in the archive at Lamport Hall, Northamptonshire. These are the only record, found for this study, which also tell of some of farmers' social countryside pursuits. After the Great War, it does not appear that the family were hunting types with the only entry being for Boxing Day 1924, when they met with the Warwickshire Hounds at Banbury Cross. Instead the Gibbards took part in shooting, and there are entries recorded for the years 1920 to 1926, together with mention of coursing on Boxing Day 1921 and 1922. The Gibbards (father and son for the study period) became very involved in the Farmers' Unions of Oxfordshire and Northamptonshire, and were also involved in the Banbury stock shows, often acting as stewards.

¹⁹⁵ In 1961 the farm was expanded by taking on Wykham Mill Farm – Pers. comm. Roger Gibbard, (various dates).

Figure 4.19: *Arable acreages per 4 June return at Crouch Farm 1925-1929*

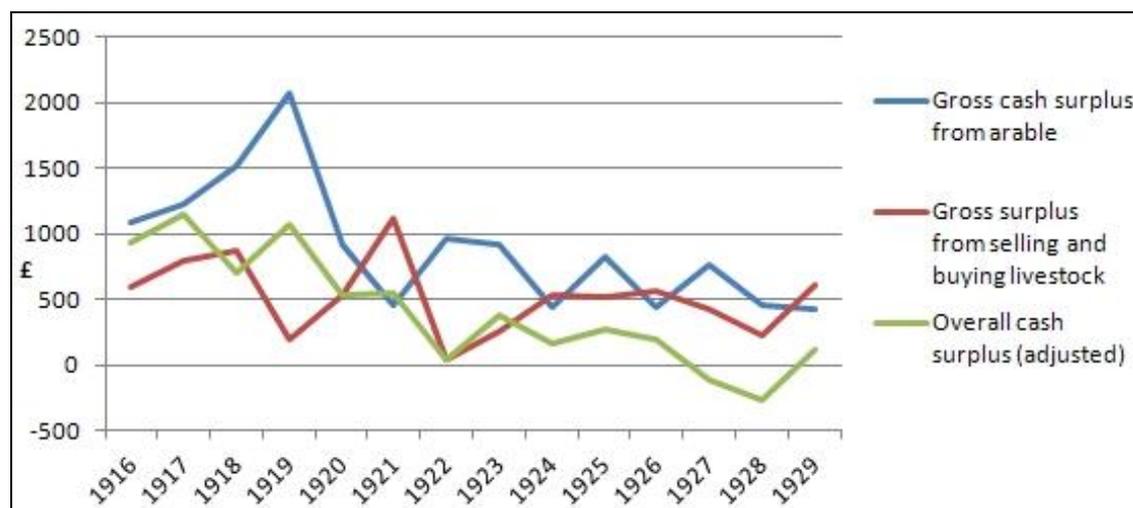


The farming diaries recorded all receipts and expenditure on a daily basis, together with details of stock bought and sold and quarters and prices of corn products sold. After totalling the individual daily figures for each calendar year, they enable a wide variety of analysis of the profitability of the farm and its component areas of activity; buying and selling prices of stock and arable products; rates paid to farm labourers; and overall cost of employing these men. Surprisingly, the six-monthly rent was sometimes omitted once or even twice in the year, and the figures have been adjusted to take account of this.

While it cannot be certain that the diary is complete as to all other receipts and payments, at the very least the graphs show a trend even if the figures may not be totally precise.

The overview of operations is shown in Figure 4.20.

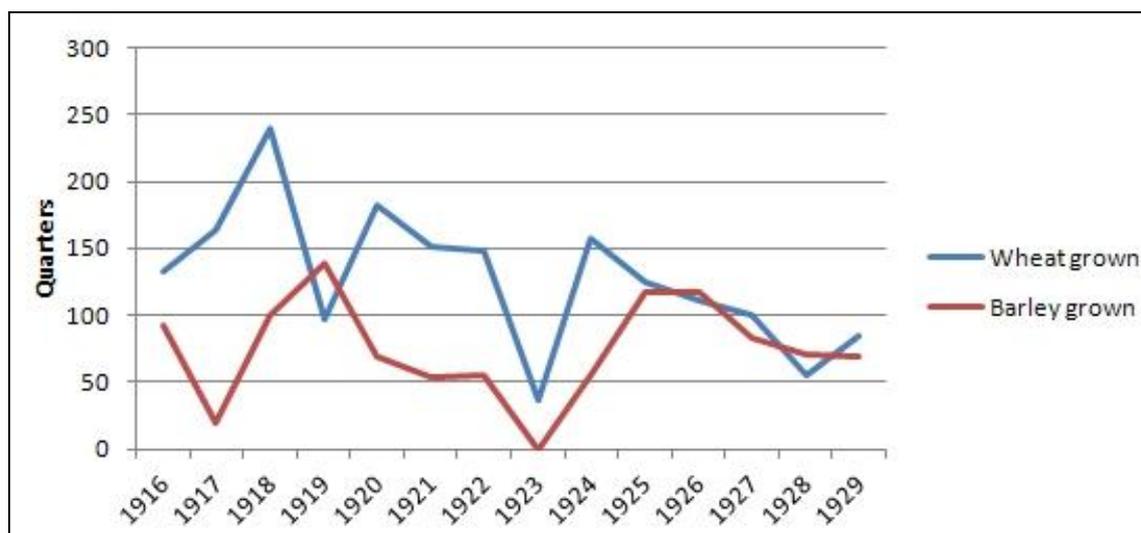
Figure 4.20: *Crouch Farm, overview of operations, 1916-1929*



The farm had made a modest cash surplus of a few hundred pounds in 1913 and 1914 (not shown on the graph), and this increased considerably after the onset of war, reaching around £1000 in the years 1916-1919. The operation was true mixed farming, fattening some 50-60 cattle, lambing and selling 110-190 sheep, and growing wheat and barley (and some oats). The annual cash surpluses varied according to whether the crops were sold in the year grown or carried forward to the next year, presumably because George Gibbard felt that prices were on the increase. The gross cash surpluses from arable and livestock only took account of expenditure which could be expressly identified, with an increasing amount of expenditure ‘on account’ with the various suppliers. The gross cash surplus from arable, shown in Figure 4.20, is the value of sales less the identifiable cost of seed. Figure 4.21 shows that there was a big increase in quarters of wheat produced in 1918 but, despite the benefit of guaranteed prices, Gibbard seems to have reduced wheat production in 1919 in favour of barley, but then went back to wheat in 1920.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁶ The barley production was usually sold in the same calendar year in which it was grown, while the wheat was often held over for sale the next spring. In addition oats were grown, presumably for the horses, at around 30-40 quarters per year.

Figure 4.21: *Wheat and barley production at Crouch Farm, 1916-1925*



The graph in Figure 4.22 shows that corn sale prices had peaked in 1919. Gibbard appeared initially to have read the barley market extremely well having increased his production of this in 1918 and 1919, benefiting from the big increase in the price of barley in 1919, but he did not follow this through to 1920 when he only grew half the amount of barley. This resulted in arable profits more than halving, despite a big jump in the wheat price.¹⁹⁷ By 1921 the price of cereals had already fallen following the removal of the guarantee, so the arable cash position was even worse. Gibbard appeared to have withdrawn from wheat and barley production in 1923, relying on wheat grown in 1922 to improve his cash flow in 1923, but also possibly hoping that prices would recover. He went back into this form of arable farming in 1924 and 1925, albeit prices remained low.

¹⁹⁷ Also there was an ‘unusual’ entry for £178 in respect of 2 tons of twine, which affected the arable surplus in 1920.

Figure 4.22: Average wheat and barley prices achieved at Crouch Farm, 1916-1925

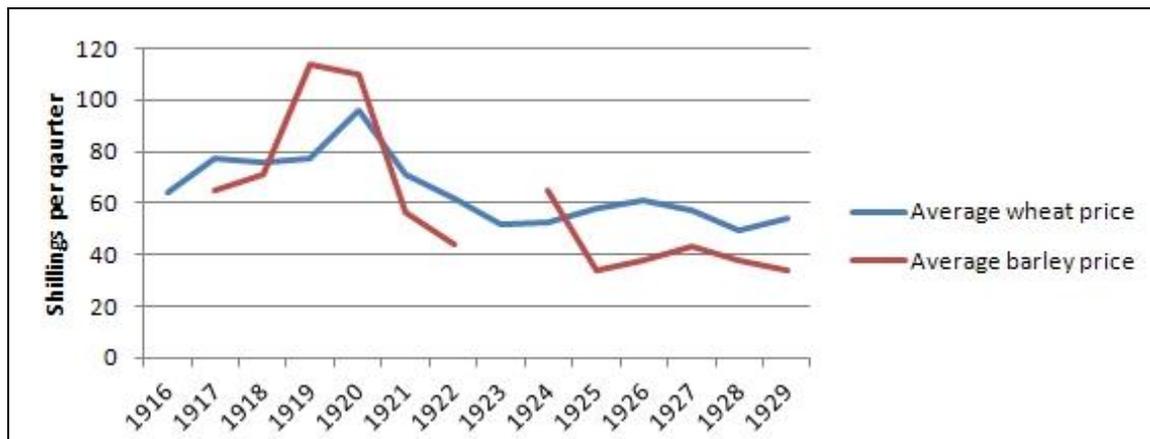
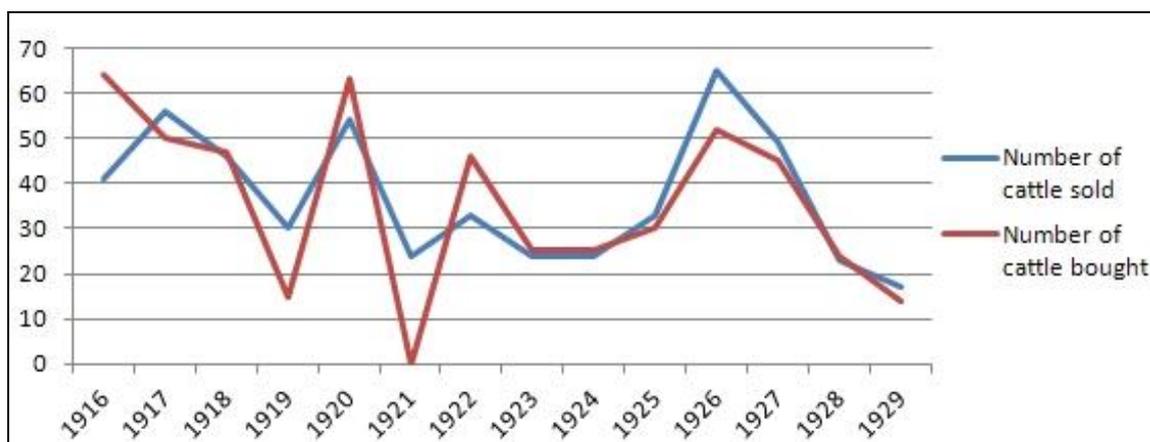


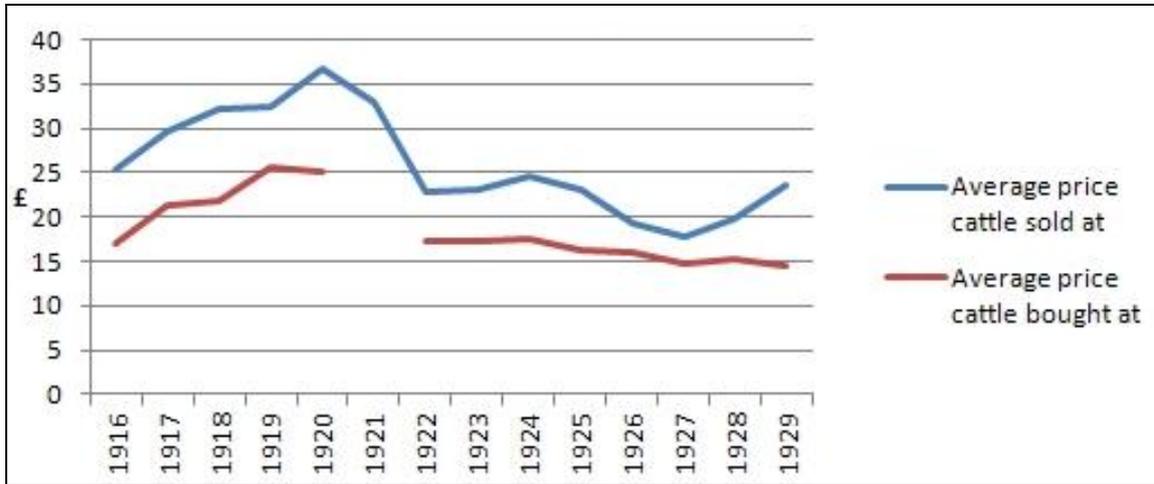
Figure 4.20, page 159, showed that livestock operations ran at a steady surplus of some £500 *p.a.*, with the exception of the last two years of the Great War, when higher prices prevailed. The Figure also showed that in 1919, the number of cattle bought and sold was significantly reduced and that, in 1921, the surplus arose because no cattle were bought. This action was probably a defensive cash-raising position in response to the sudden deflation in prices. The spike in numbers sold and bought in 1926 and 1927, shown in Figure 4.23, was perhaps due to optimism that the market was about to recover.

Figure 4.23: Number of cattle sold and bought at Crouch Farm, 1916-1929



This was not borne out in practice as shown by the trend prices at which he bought and sold, Figure 4.24, with cattle selling prices dipping in this period.

Figure 4.24: Average unit selling and buying price of cattle at Crouch Farm, 1916-1929



Figures 4.25 and 4.26 show that his sheep-breeding operations seemed to have followed a steadier path but, again, there was a dip in the price between 1926 and 1928.

Figure 4.25: Number of sheep sold and bought at Crouch Farm, 1916-1929

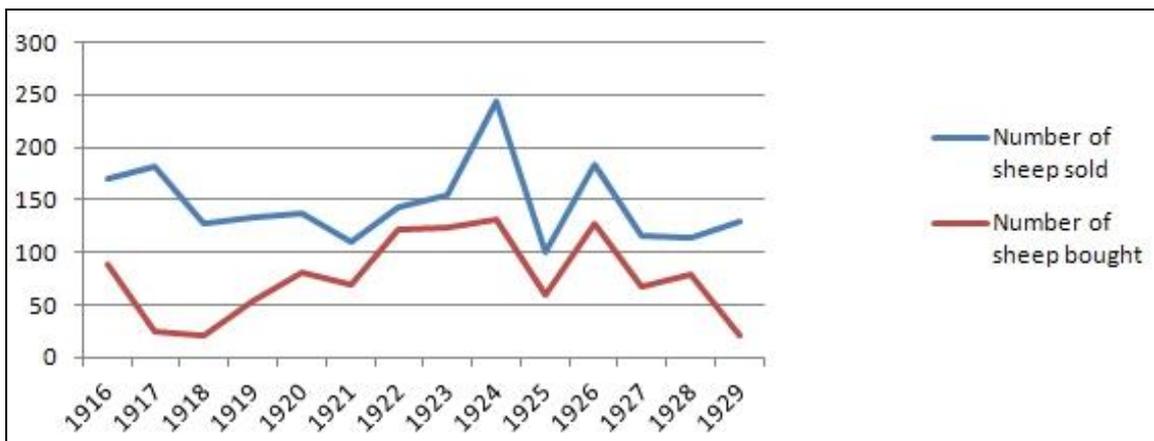
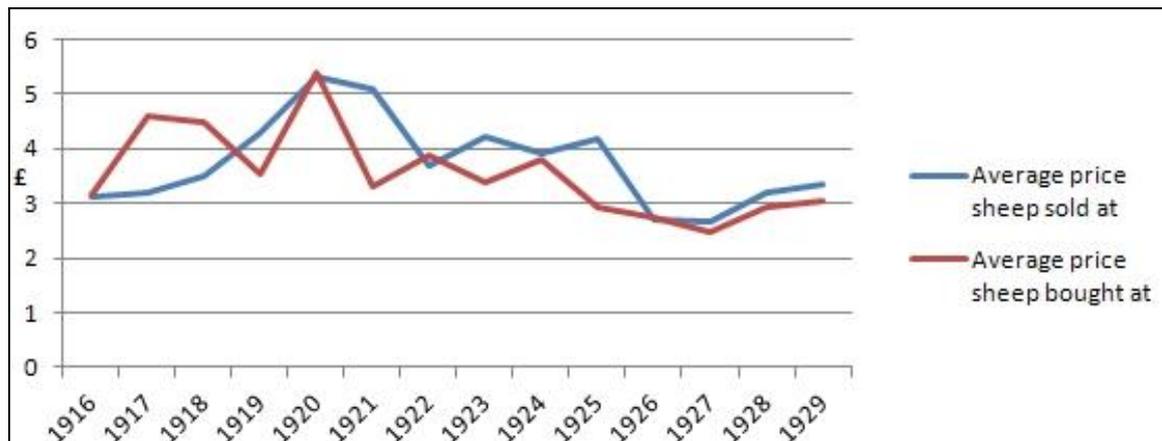


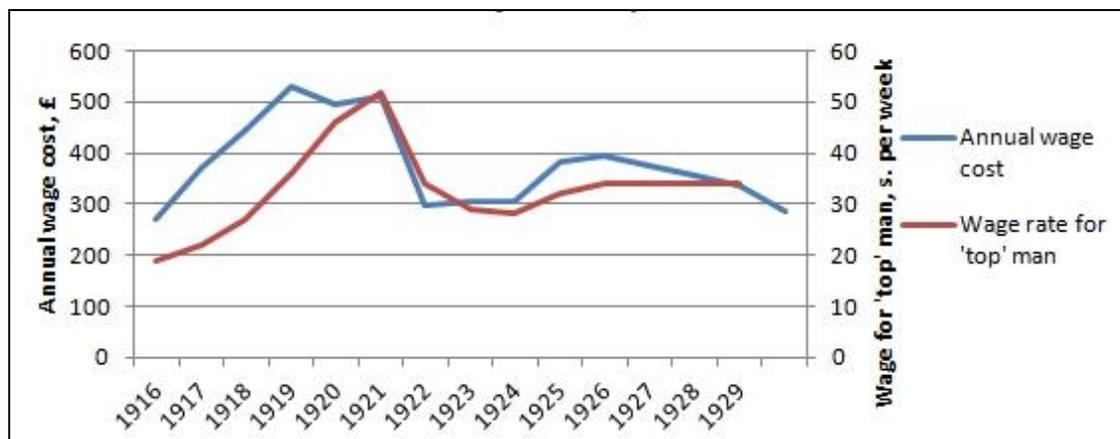
Figure 4.26: *Average unit selling and buying price of sheep at Crouch Farm, 1916-1929*



Gibbard's operation, probably typical of farms of this nature, was a family affair, with his labourers very much part of the family, and extremely loyal. This was shown in an entry at the front of the 1938 diary, which recorded entries for long service with the Agricultural Association. At that time, Jim Green had been employed by Gibbard for 40 years, having started work at the age of 12. Joe Green, presumably a younger brother, had started in 1914 also at the age of 12, and George Pitkin had served Gibbard for 28 years. As the number of labourers had been reduced in the 1920s, these became the stalwart team at Crouch Farm, and not unsurprisingly, Gibbard tended to pay them at rates above the minimum. It is very clear, particularly from the information on the 4 June Returns, that Gibbard had not reduced his activities at any time in the period 1916-1929, although his number of permanent staff reduced from six at the end of the Great War to three in 1929. There was no particular evidence of mechanisation, so it is not clear how this was achieved.

The annual wage cost and the wage rate, in shillings per week for the highest earning labourer, are shown in Figure 4.27, and this reflects the very large wage inflation from 1916-1921; the collapse in wages that followed; and the levelling out at the end of the 1920s.

Figure 4.27: Annual wage cost and weekly wage paid to the highest earning labourer at Crouch Farm, 1916-1929



With the scrapping of the Wages Board, farmers were free to reduce wages, with a labourer in Blythe's *Akenfield* telling of these coming down from the guaranteed minimum of 46s, first to 42/6d, then to 38/6d, and finally to 27/6d. Jim Green on the Gibbard farm was earning 52s at the start of 1921 and 28s by the end of 1922.¹⁹⁸ Farmers often led, or tried to lead, the rate downwards with Tomkins of Welby in Northamptonshire refusing to pay the 36s rate agreed and offering his workers 30s.¹⁹⁹ The workers went on strike for 16 weeks, but to little avail as the county rate fell to 31s.

However, what the graphs do not show was Gibbard's prudence in dealing with the big gains of the period 1915-1921. With £1541 surpluses for the two years 1915-1916, the total of his surpluses for this period was some £5500. During and soon after the war years, he had invested in shares, in rented properties, and even as a provider of mortgage finance. In addition, there were net proceeds of £1700 in 1919 from a sale described as

¹⁹⁸ Blythe, *Akenfield*, p. 47. Gibbard diaries 1921 and 1922.

¹⁹⁹ Groves, *Sharpen the Sickle!*, pp. 174-175.

‘Wykham’ to Major Crossley.²⁰⁰ It is not clear whether this was the farming interest or included land, but clearly Gibbard profited well from this involvement. In 1925, he had dividend income of £502 (unusually this is recorded at the front of the journal), and the descriptions of stocks suggested that dividend or interest had been payable at a rate of six to six and a half percent. Assuming that it was not taxed at source, this implied a portfolio of around £8000 of such stocks (value today approximately £500,000) consistent with the surpluses of £7200 in this period, derived above.²⁰¹ Gibbard had invested these surpluses so was not reliant solely on his farming income, although as Figure 4.20 on page 159 shows, he continued to make a cash surplus through to 1926.

It is interesting to see how his operation fared in the critical year of 1921 when deflation struck. An adjusted cash surplus of £555 resulted and, although this was at a similar level to 1920, this is just a coincidence. Instead of total receipts or turnover for the year of £4975 in 1920, the figure for 1921 was less than half at £2374. The much higher livestock cash surplus of £1124 (compared with £528 in 1920) reflected the fact that this included some £800 from sales of cattle with no cattle purchases being made that year. Sheep transactions continued at levels seen in the previous years, so the same approach was not taken here. So the cash surplus in 1921 was achieved largely by selling down his cattle stock. The misfortunes of 1921 were not helped by the weather either. Pitsford weather station records that, in Northamptonshire in 2011, rainfall was 399.5mm noting that this was the driest year since 1921.²⁰² The weather station at neighbouring Oxford

²⁰⁰ The net proceeds of this, which resulted from a gross sale of £2350, are not shown in the figures in Figure 4.20, as this is an exceptional gain.

²⁰¹ <http://www.bankofengland.co.uk/education/Pages/resources/inflationtools/calculator/flash/default.aspx> [accessed 1 May 2015]

²⁰² Pitsford School, ‘Pitsford Hall weather station’, <http://www.northantsweather.org.uk/> [accessed 23 March 2012].

recorded only 16mm of rain in the two months of June and July 1921 and 379.3mm for the year, the driest since recording began in 1853.²⁰³ A farm labourer in Blythe's *Akenfield* reported that there was 'no rain from March through to October', and that the corn 'didn't grow no more than a foot high and most of it didn't come to the ear'.²⁰⁴

It was shown earlier in Figures 4.2 and 4.3, pages 98-99, that the rapid deflation of prices had almost reached its nadir by 1922, with Gibbard's cash surplus, as shown in Figure 4.20 on page 159, being reduced to almost zero that year. Under the circumstances this was a considerable achievement, but clearly Gibbard was a very resourceful man, even going into brewing in 1921, and turkeys in 1922, albeit only for a gain of some £40. At this stage, it looked as though he had weathered the storm, and there was still his income from stocks and shares and benefit of mortgages that he had granted.²⁰⁵ However, it was the long period of depression that followed this which was the real problem for farmers, with even Gibbard's income in the period after 1926 being significantly affected. A similar effect is seen from other farmers later. However, there are differences depending on whether the farming operation was an ongoing one which had benefited from the good times of the Great War, and whether the farmer had prudently invested these gains, as had Gibbard, so as to insulate himself from the downturn of the 1920s and 1930s. Nonetheless, by the end of the 1920s, Gibbard was still managing not to lose any significant amounts on his farming operations. The 1930s were not so benign, as will be seen on pages 279-285.

²⁰³ The Meteorological Office, 'Oxford data'.

²⁰⁴ Blythe, *Akenfield*, p. 47.

²⁰⁵ Except for 1925, which is recorded above the entry for 1 February 1923, any record of this had disappeared from the journal into the 'trading account'.

Home Farm, Boughton House, Northamptonshire

The location of Boughton House is shown in Figure 4.28, together with a current photograph of the house.

Figure 4.28: *Location of Boughton House in Northamptonshire*



The farm was held in-hand for the interwar years and the preceding and following war years. The size of the farm is believed to have been 547 acres, consistent with the acreage of its component activities.²⁰⁶ Its labour bill was significantly larger than owner occupier farms where the owner worked whereas, in this case, the farm was managed by a land agent and his charges were presumably included in the labour cost. The way in which the annual accounts were presented in the cash book suggests that the rent was an estimated part of the Schedule A assessment for the entire estate. There were some references to the rent not being paid but so as to properly evaluate the farming operation, this was included whether paid or not. The annual financial result was established after taking account of opening and closing stock, so these are true profit or loss figures. In the period of the Great War, there was reference to the figures being expressed after an interest charge of three percent of the capital employed, but there was no specific figure in the accounts. It is also not clear whether this approach was used in the following years. So, there are a number of caveats as to the comparability of the figures from year to year but, these notwithstanding, Figure 4.29 shows the profitability for the period 1910 to 1942, these being years ending 25 March. It shows the relatively benign situation on the eve of the Great War; the large profits during that war and immediately afterwards; the plummet into loss in the year ending 25 March 1922 as a result of the great deflation; and the depressed state of farming that then followed until the Second World War. It is a clear representation of the difficult state of farming in the interwar years. In 1922-1928, the period covered by this chapter, the operation ran at a loss.

²⁰⁶ Pers. comm. Crispin Powell, Boughton House archivist, (5 June 2013). Records of Boughton House by courtesy of the Duke of Buccleuch, particularly Home Farm Ledgers 1909-1921, 1921-1930 and 1930-1936; Home Farm Cash Books 1910-1921, 1921-1930 and 1930-1944.

Figure 4.29: Profit/Loss at Home Farm, Boughton House, 1910-1942



The farming operation was mixed, as is shown by the two Figures below. The arable operations, shown in Figure 4.30 and which included small amounts of barley and oats, were subservient in value and size, to the livestock operations.

Figure 4.30: Wheat turnover at Home Farm, Boughton, 1918-1941

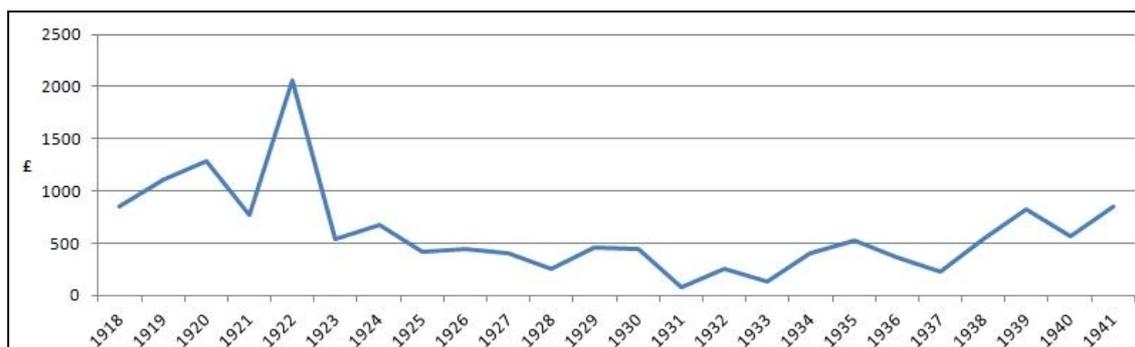
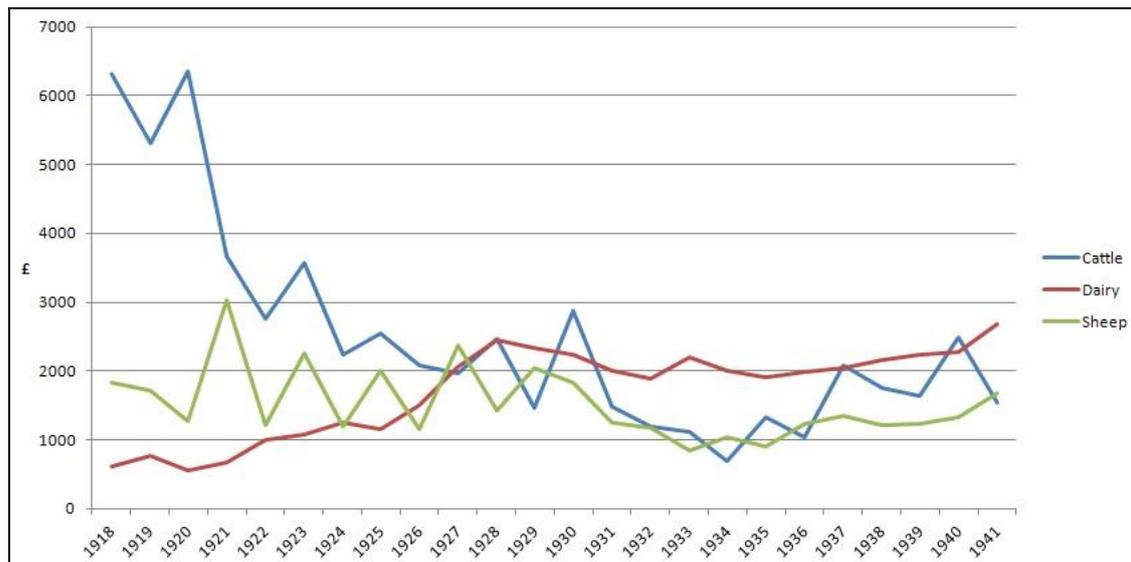


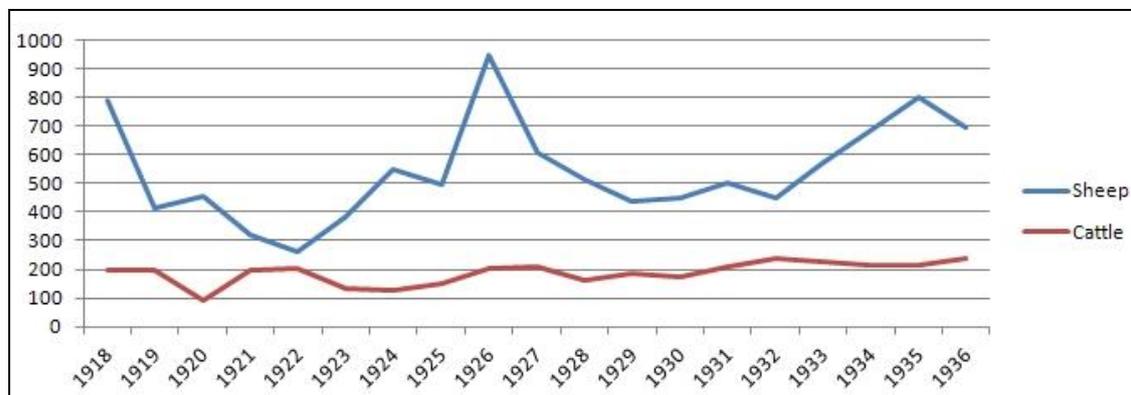
Figure 4.31, a graphical representation of the livestock operations, shows that dairying had increased from 1927 onwards. This suggested considerable foresight as the cattle fattening and dairying markets were holding up, while arable was in decline. However the cattle fattening market worsened from 1930 onwards, when dairy became relatively more profitable.

Figure 4.31: *Turnover of livestock operations at Home Farm, Boughton, 1918-1941*



The estimated number of cattle and sheep is shown in Figure 4.32.²⁰⁷ There was a slight uplift in the number of cattle from 1926 onwards.

Figure 4.32: *Estimated number of cattle and sheep at Home Farm, Boughton, 1918-1936*



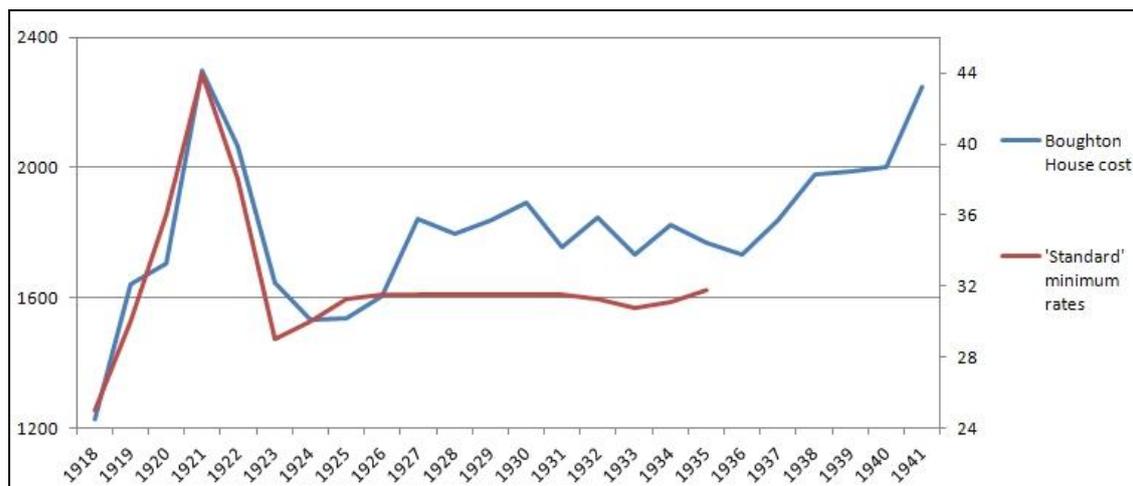
Analysis of the figures for the year to 25 March 1921 (before deflation took hold) and the following year (after prices had deflated) do not suggest any particular strategy during the latter year. In the year to March 1921, the business had geared up its cattle operations with stock of cattle having almost doubled from £3446 to £6433 due to increased numbers and values prevailing, as shown in Figure 4.32. However, profit was down from

²⁰⁷ The closing stock figures, by value, are divided by the average cost per animal derived from information from Crouch Farm.

£3716 to £295 due to increased costs and decreased wheat sales. In the year to March 1922, there was a loss of £3140. Cattle numbers remained the same and cattle and sheep stock value fell, but wheat production increased considerably, a strange decision with prices already lower.

Figure 4.33 tracks the labour costs at Boughton House against national labour rate. The amount of labour probably remained static until 1926, when additional manpower was taken on, presumably in connection with the move to increased dairying.²⁰⁸

Figure 4.33: *Labour costs suggesting increased manpower from 1927 onwards at Home Farm Boughton, 1918-1941*



Typical of large estate in-hand farming, this operation moved into significant losses in the post-war period, as a result of the much higher attendant manpower costs. Similar patterns were found at the Pitt Hall and Elton Hall estates, pages 189 and 197-203.

²⁰⁸ National rates from the end of 1917 to the end of 1919 are based on figures in Green, *A History of the English Agricultural Labourer*, pp. 255-331. Rates from 1920 to 1923 are deduced from Minutes of Northants and Warwicks NFU. Figures from 1925 onwards come from Ernle, *English Farming*, p. 527. The missing year is an estimate.

Cumber farms at Yatesbury, Bradfield and Theale

The Cumber family worked two farms at Theale, one of which was c. 350 acres and was acquired in 1919; the two farms at Bradfield totalling c. 600 acres; and Manor Farm, Yatesbury, c. 800 acres. The latter was at least 40 miles to the west of the other farms, so the locations are shown on two separate maps in Figure 4.34. The family records do not record how they farmed operations so far apart.²⁰⁹

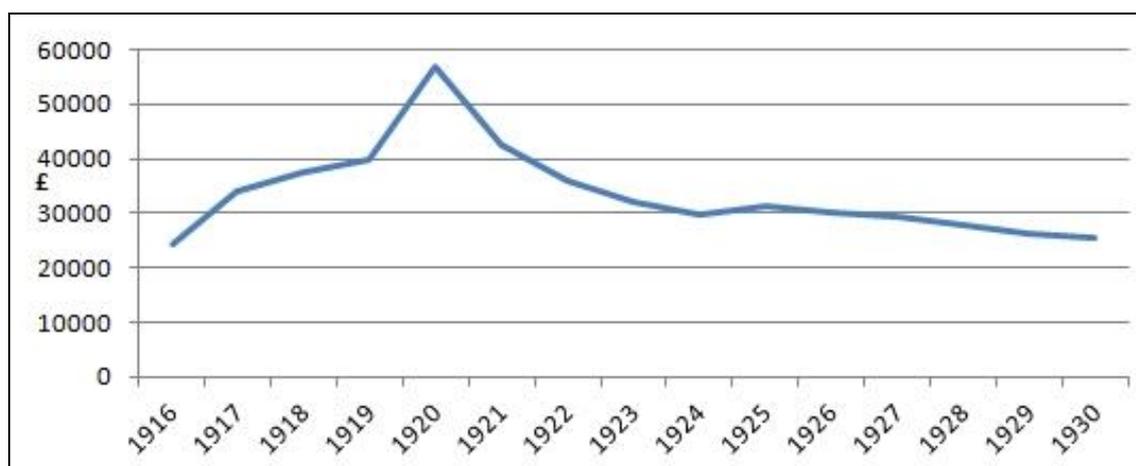
Figure 4.34: *Locations of the three centres of the Cumber farming operations*



²⁰⁹ Pers. comm. William Cumber, Manor Farm, Marcham, Oxon, (7 March 2014).

The Cumber family has a very long history as butchers, but W. J. Cumber, the grandfather of the contact, born in 1878, started farming around 1900 on rented land. The family have accounts going back to 1910, with a gap in the mid 1930s.²¹⁰ The earliest accounts from 1910 showed the emergence of what was to become the key part of this operation, its shire breeding stallions. This analysis starts at 1916 and, in this chapter, goes to 1930 to provide overlap with the period in the next chapter. By 1916 the shire horse operation at the farm in Yatesbury was already making an annual gross profit of some £1500. The other farming operations were substantially livestock grazing, although there was a small amount of arable, probably for feed. Figure 4.35 shows the change in Cumber's net assets over the period 1916-1930 with these in 1916 standing at around £25,000, and peaking at £57,000 in 1920 (some £4m today). Thereafter, the ravages of the 1921 deflation and the period that followed reduced these net assets back to the level that they had been in 1916.

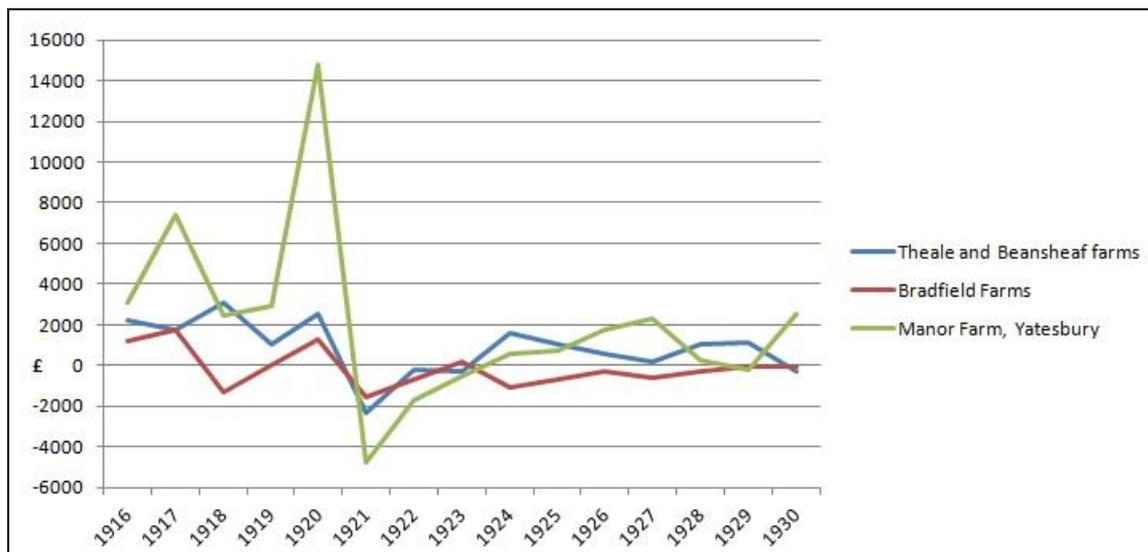
Figure 4.35: *Cumber capital account, 1916-1930*



²¹⁰ Copies of these accounts were deposited at MERL many years ago, seemingly with the assistance of Miss Edith Whetham, to whom they were lent (Pers. comm. Jennifer Glanville at MERL, 11 February 2014). These copies were never returned and have been lost. The originals were, as a result of this contact, lent to MERL for re-copying and deposit.

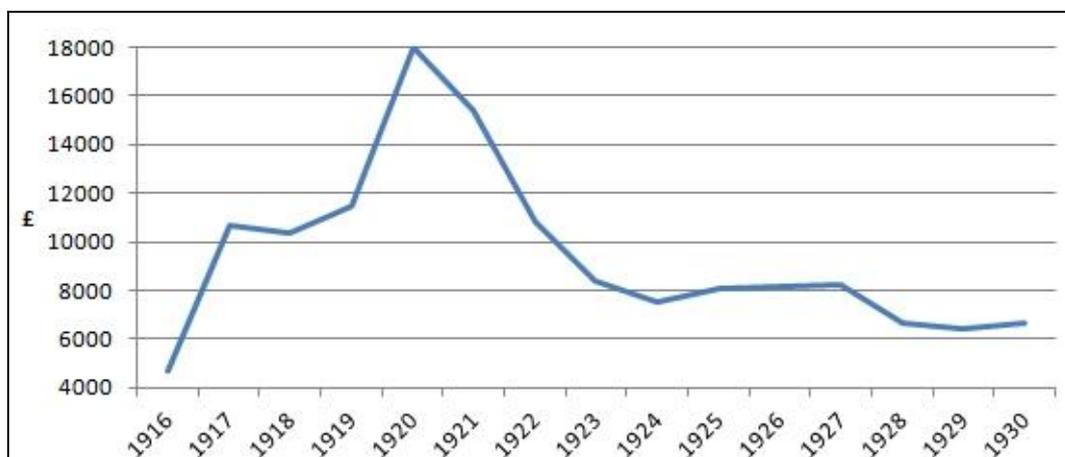
Profits from the three separate farming operations are shown in Figure 4.36. The two large upswings in profit in 1917 and 1920 and a downswing in 1921 at Yatesbury are explained by the increase in value of the shire horse stock – there was no evidence of stock numbers changing significantly.

Figure 4.36: *Cumber profits per profit centre*



No specific explanation has been found for the apparent very large increase in the value of shire horses in 1920, shown in Figure 4.37, but perhaps values were ramped up as with most other commodities in the immediate post-war period.

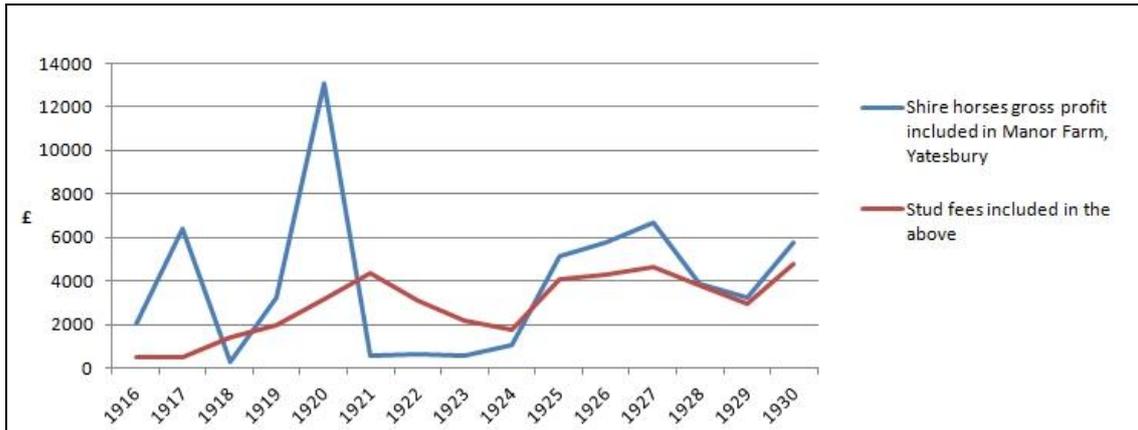
Figure 4.37: *Cumber, shire horse stock, 1916-1930*



The respective contributions of shire horse sales and stud fees is shown in Figure 4.38.

Both lines on the graph represent gross trading profits, before even wages are taken into account, and this shows the gradual evolution of the stud business.

Figure 4.38: *Cumber, shire horse and stud operations, 1916-1930*



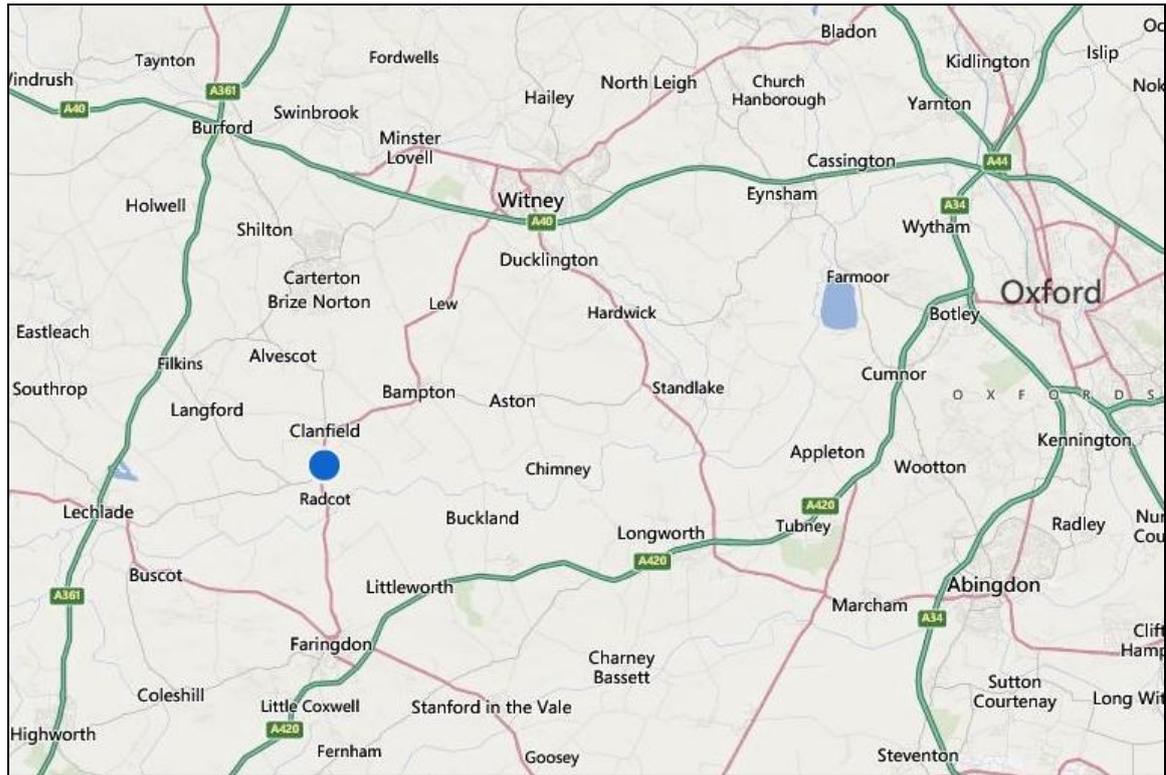
The shire horse operations were the principal driver of profitability at Yatesbury with the trend of overall profit in Figure 4.36 being mirrored by the shire horse gross profit in Figure 4.38. The costs of the shire horse operation, as distinct from the costs of other livestock operations at Yatesbury, could not be ascertained from the available records. It was not possible, therefore, to quantify the extent to which shire horses saved Cumber from a much worse deflationary downturn after 1920, than was shown in figure 4.35, page 173. It is clear, though, that this specialisation played an important role in this family's farming fortunes.

Friars Court, Clanfield, Oxfordshire

Clanfield is located west of Oxford and south of Burford, as shown in Figure 4.39.

Geographically, it is sited on the south-eastern slopes of the Cotswolds.

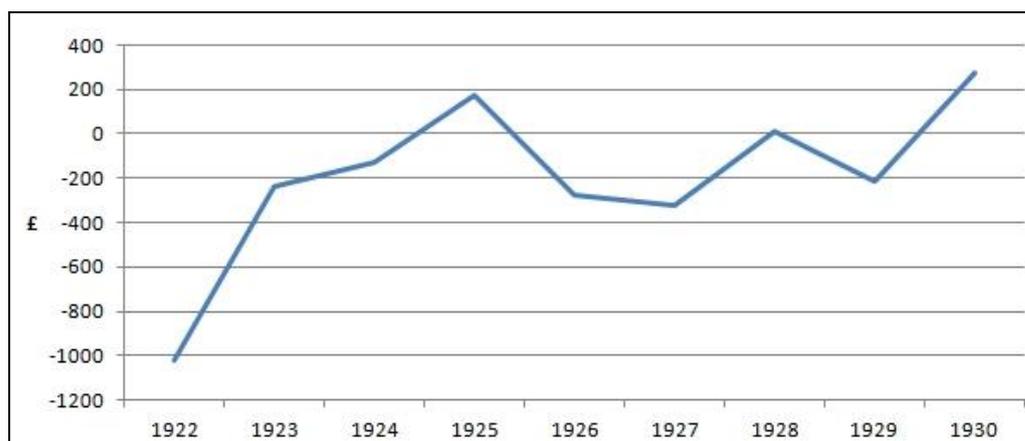
Figure 4.39: *Location map of Clanfield*



From the records, Friars Court appeared to have been run as a cattle fattening and dairy farm. There is a complete set of professionally-produced profit and loss accounts from 1922 onwards, and these are a rare find.²¹¹ So as to overlap the later period in the next chapter, the profit is shown in Figure 4.40 to 1930.

²¹¹ Pers. comm. Charles Willmer, Clanfield, Oxon, (22 January 2014).

Figure 4.40: *Farming profits of Willmer family at Friars Court, 1922-1930*

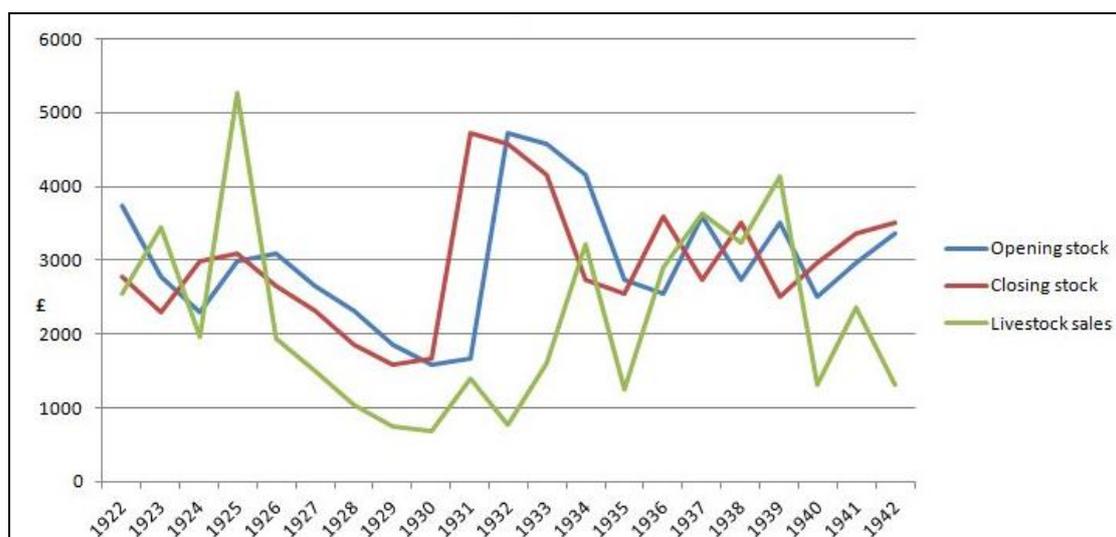


At the time the farm was 200 acres having been leased in 1917 by Richard Willmer from James Fereman, whose father had acquired it as mortgagee in possession in the 1880s.²¹² In 1920 the tenant had been pressurised to buy the farm or to face eviction as tenant, and the reported price paid was £12,000, a very hefty £60 per acre. The approximate £4000 capital base of the business at September 1919 and September 1922, together with a small bank loan of £1775 does not suggest how this was funded, with the balance sheets not showing the farm purchase or asset, probably held ‘off balance sheet’ by the family.

Figure 4.40 demonstrates that the business was unable to pick up from the burden of the high purchase cost. The records of the combined business affairs of the Willmer family from 1917 onwards included a hay and straw business based around Swindon, with a turnover averaging around £30,000 *p.a.* for the three years ending 30 September 1919, equivalent to £1.5m today, but profits of only £2000 for the total period. Figure 4.41 suggests that, in 1925, the family briefly entered the cattle dealing market, as the very high sales figure were balanced by similarly high purchase costs.

²¹² The acreage is confirmed by the National Farm Survey, carried out in November 1941, which shows 212 acres., see TNA, MAF 32/911/246.

Figure 4.41: *Opening and closing stock and livestock sales figures at Friars Court*



This was a route that many farmers took at this time, as described by A.G. Street, but which did not yield them worthwhile profits, and was thus a course from which they rapidly retreated.²¹³ The financial state of the farming operation was worse in the 1930s, as confirmed by the family and as shown in the next chapter, pages 290-291.

Underwood family farms at Long Buckby, Northamptonshire

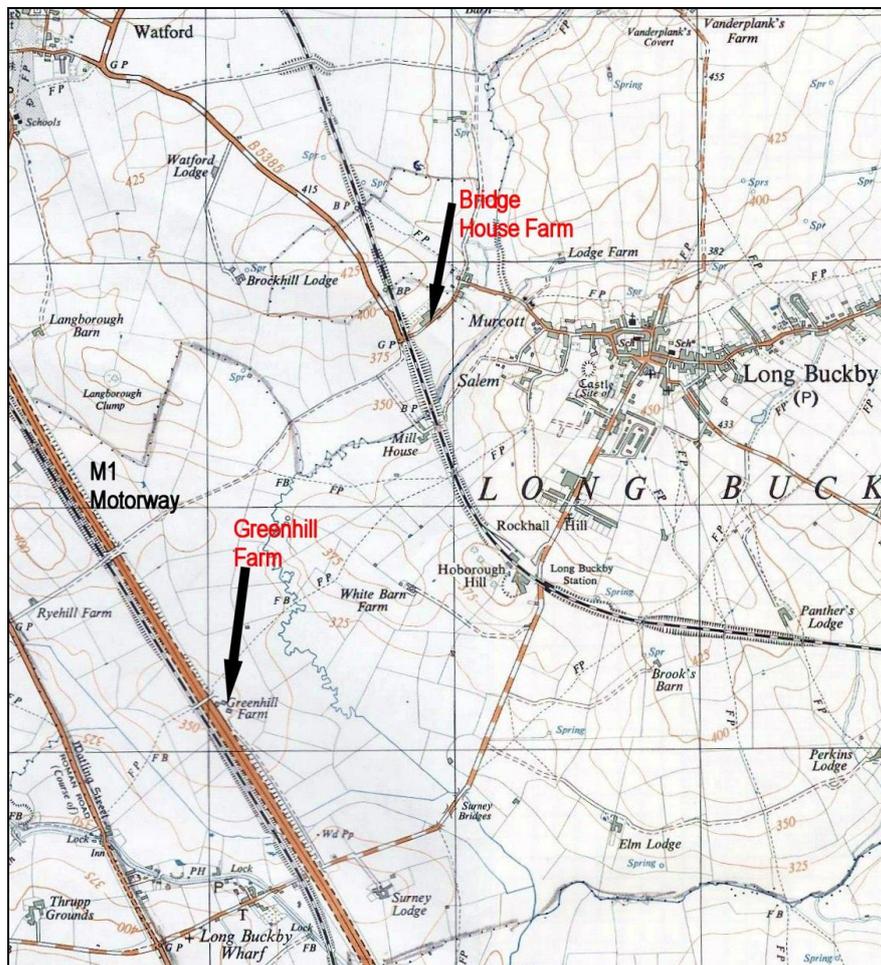
This farming operation was almost exclusively cattle fattening, the Underwood family having farmed in the Murcott area of Long Buckby for five generations.²¹⁴ Harry Underwood had been farming Bridge House Farm, c. 300 acres, before the Great War. In 1919 his son, Charles Tebbitt Underwood, took the tenancy of the adjacent Greenhill Farm, c. 230 acres, at £260 *p.a.*²¹⁵ Both farms were tenanted from the Spencer family of Althorp, and their approximate locations are shown in Figure 4.42.

²¹³ Street, *The Gentleman of the Party*, p. 200. There is an exception to this lack of success in cattle dealing shown in the footnote on page 227 and relating to the May family of Barnstaple.

²¹⁴ Pers. comm. Jennifer Thompson, Long Buckby, (9 December 2013). Referral to this family came from Long Buckby History Society.

²¹⁵ Contemporary offer in a letter from Spencer's agent.

Figure 4.42: Map showing the locations of Bridge House farmhouse, and Greenhill farm buildings, Long Buckby



The land here is very fertile grazing land for cattle fattening, of a quality similar to that in the Welland valley. Accordingly the farms were run as beef fattening, with over-wintered sheep and a few horses, and some oats and hay as feed. In 1924, the Spencer family had faced heavy death duties and the need to raise cash.²¹⁶ Both farms were offered for sale, and were bought by Harry Underwood for approximately £13000, equivalent to £24 per acre. Harry continued the tenancy to son, Charles, at Greenhill Farm, shown here in Figure 4.43 from a family photograph before it was demolished in 1959 after the family had sold it to make way for the M1 motorway.

²¹⁶ Pers. comm. Jennifer Thompson, Long Buckby, (9 December 2013). A personal letter of May 1924 from Earl Spencer cites death duties and his regret at having to sell.

Figure 4.43: *Greenhill Farm before demolition*



Charles Underwood married in 1927 and had two daughters, born in 1928 and 1930.

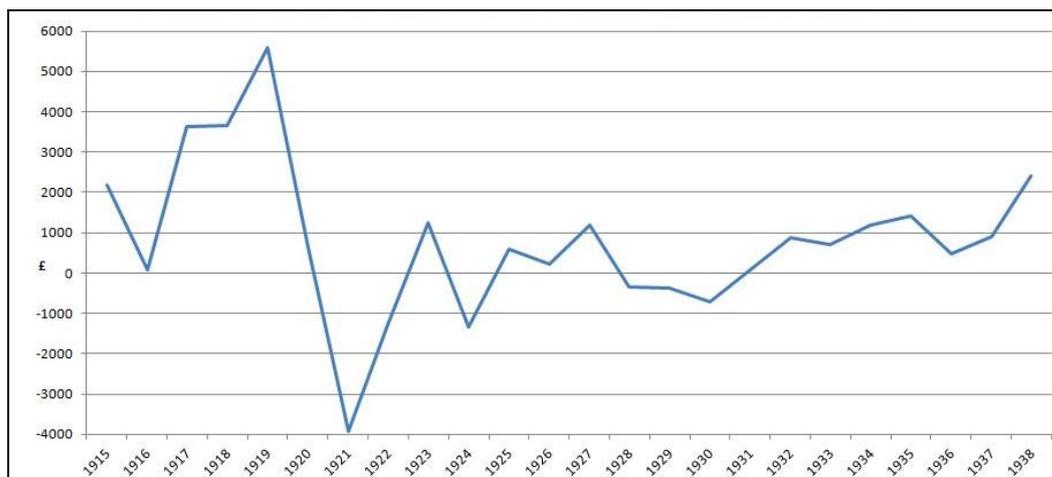
Bridge House Farm, photographed by the author and shown in Figure 4.44, has gone down through the female side of the family, which still farms it today. Its records start in 1928, so are shown on pages 292-293 in the next chapter.

Figure 4.44: *Bridge House Farm as it is today*



Although there are some deficiencies in the way in which records were kept in the cash books, it would appear that Harry made significant profits during the period of the Great War and immediately thereafter, a surplus of some £15,000 arising over the period 1915-1919. These, it seems, were wisely invested in stocks and bonds as the farm purchases in 1924 were funded by sale of some of these. Immediately after the Great War, Harry's farming business was turning over around £20,000 *p.a.*, equivalent today to about £0.75m.²¹⁷ By any standards, this was a very significant business. Around 300 cattle were being bought annually and, in the middle of the year, the herd size had been around 250 beasts. Harry's profits for the period 1915-1938 are shown in Figure 4.45.

Figure 4.45: *Harry Underwood's farming profits from 1915-1938*



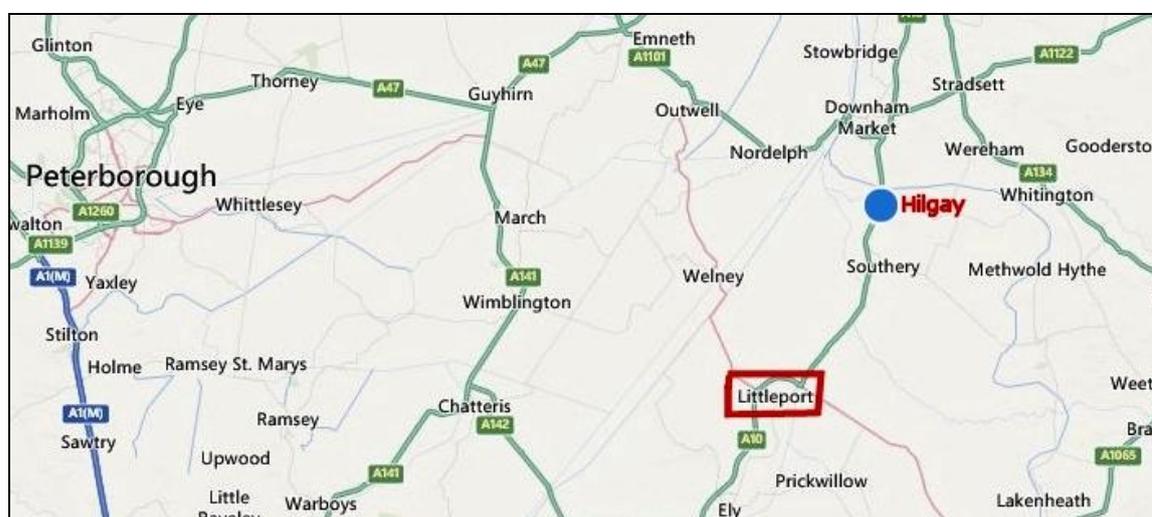
So far as the period relevant to this chapter is concerned and during the period of deflation from 1921-1922, his profit dipped from a small one of some £600 in 1920 to a loss of nearly £4000 in 1921, possibly funded by a repayment of a loan that he had given his son, Charles, when the latter set up on his own in 1919. Harry's losses continued into 1922, reverting briefly back to profit in 1923. The mid 1920s upturn arrived in 1927, later than in most other examples, before sliding back into loss at the end of the 1920s.

²¹⁷<http://www.bankofengland.co.uk/education/Pages/resources/inflationtools/calculator/index1.aspx> [accessed 1 May 2015].

Martin farms in the Isle of Ely, Cambridgeshire

This is the first of four farms included as part of the broader research of records held at MERL. H. J. and H. G. Martin of Littleport, Isle of Ely, were understood to have farmed a total of c. 2000 acres.²¹⁸ The deposit record stated this to be the account book for Branden Creek Farm, Ousebridge Farm, Upton Farm, and Willow Rows Farm, all in Littleport, Cambridgeshire, and Lowes Farm in Hilgay, Norfolk.

Figure 4.46: *Map showing the location of the Martin farms in Littleport and Hilgay*

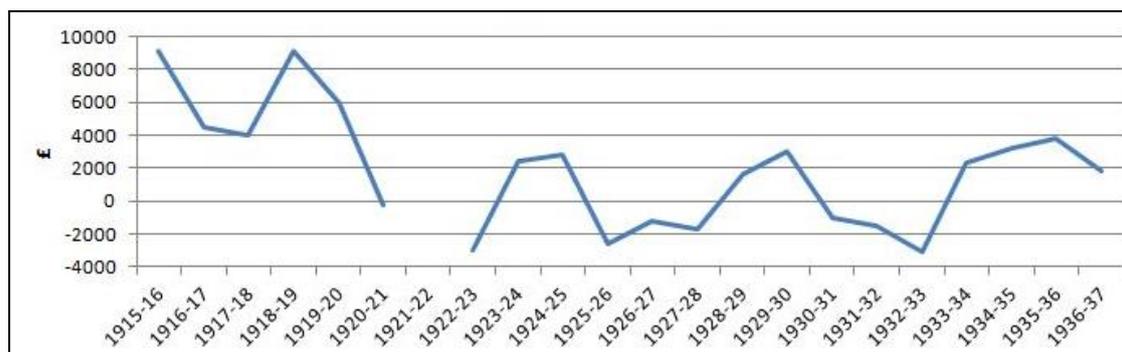


The donor's family, long established in the Littleport area, had occupied one farm for over 120 years. During the interwar years the family had been primarily concerned with pedigree Friesian cattle and, after 1925, with sugar beet. However, there had been a large acreage of potatoes, with wheat and barley. Up to 1914, the holding was described as being about 600 acres, rising immediately after the Great War to 1500 acres and later to c. 2000 acres.²¹⁹ Figure 4.47 covers the entire period for which figures are available.

²¹⁸ MERL CAM 3/1/22 to 3/1/36. The figures from 1915-1916 to 1920-1921 are not supported by account books, but come from the back of subsequent books. Assume covers the 5 farms. 3/1/11 to 3/1/21 are 1910-1920 Branden Creek Farm only (not inspected).

²¹⁹ <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/a2a/records.aspx?cat=007-cam3&cid=-1#-1> [accessed 24 October 2013].

Figure 4.47: *Profits from the farms of the Martin family in the Isle of Ely, 1915-1937*



Figures for 1921-1922 were stated to be only for three months and these were not supported by a deposited record, but showed a profit of £3610, which has been omitted from the graph in Figure 4.47. It is a matter of speculation as to why this was for three months only, but as it is a large profit, it might be speculated that they sold down their stock and more or less came out of the market. The operation was mixed farming, with stock and dairy cattle, sheep, pigs and arable. The labour cost in the period from 1923 to 1937 was very constant ranging between £10,000 and £13,000, suggesting that the acreage of the holding was static through this period. In this case, the upturn after the period of deflation was earlier than most, coming in 1923-1924, and the subsequent downturn earlier too. The graph shows falls in profit soon after the end of the war, in 1925-1926, and after 1930, much in line with trends found elsewhere.

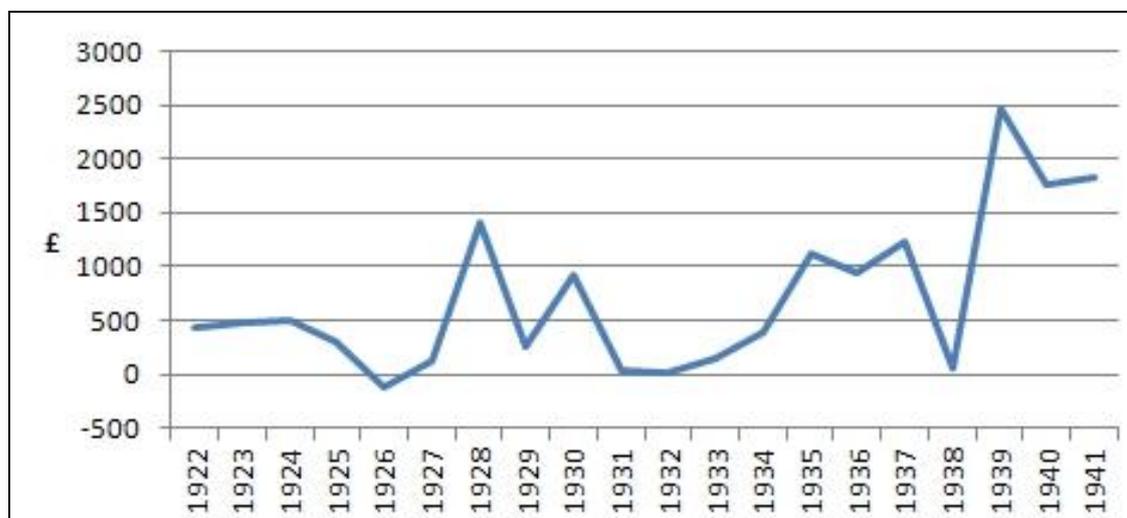
Anonymous fattening farm in Long Buckby, Northamptonshire

This farm was also in the Long Buckby area of Northamptonshire, but has to remain anonymous at the request of the owner.²²⁰ Like the Underwood operation, it was run all pasture, with both cattle and lambs being bought in the spring, fattened on the grass and sold in October. There were no buildings, so no way of holding livestock over the winter, thus it was the simplest and least labour intensive method of farming. The farm was first

²²⁰ Pers. comm. anonymous by his own request.

rented in 1922, so operations started after the great deflation of 1921. A single profit figure was provided for each year, with the period 1922-1941 shown in Figure 4.48.

Figure 4.48: *Profit at a farm in Long Buckby, 1922-1941*



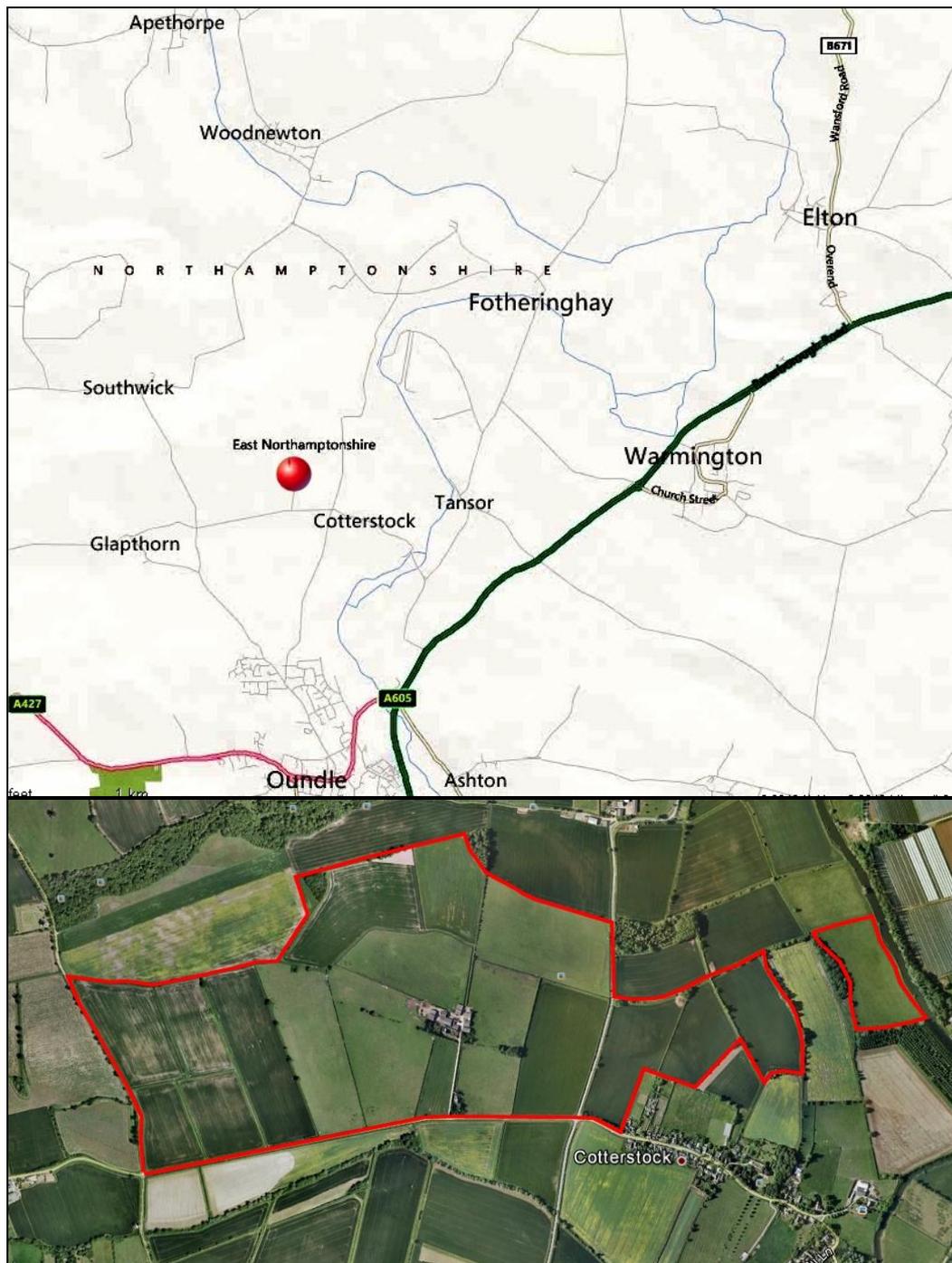
The figures for the last three years of the 1920s are surprising, but with only a single profit figure available, there may have been other considerations at work. The operation stayed in profit at the end of the 1920s, whereas the Underwood farm moved into loss 1928 onwards. The 1930s are examined in the next chapter, pages 293-294.

Cotterstock Lodge, Northamptonshire

The Richardson family started farming at Cotterstock Lodge Farm around 1890.²²¹ The 343-acre farm was some 4.5 kilometres north of Oundle in a very rural location, and there are insufficient neighbouring village landmarks to identify this on a map, so instead its location from the air is shown edged-red in the lower part of Figure 4.49.

²²¹ Pers. comm. John and James Richardson of Townsend Farm, Southwick, (13 March 2013).

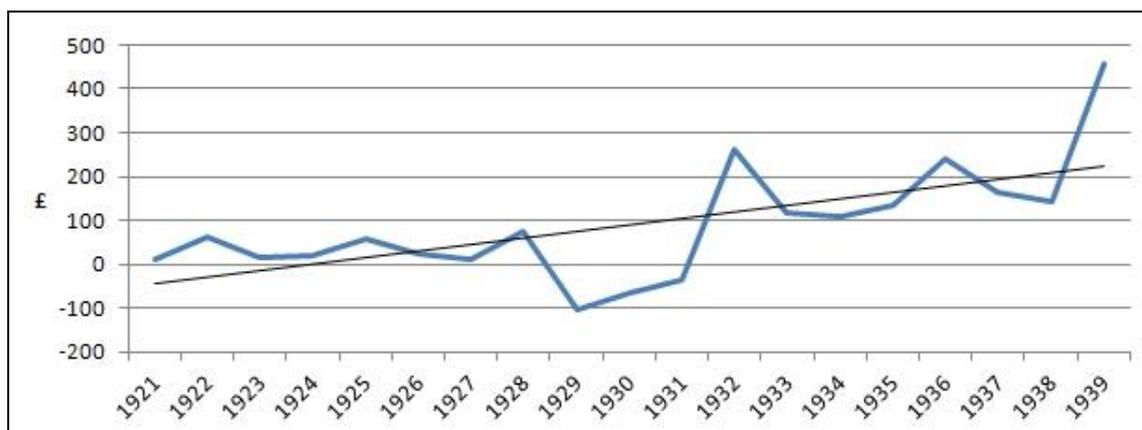
Figure 4.49: Location of Cotterstock Lodge Farm



The freehold was acquired before auction in 1927 from the Apethorpe Estate, which was broken up in the 1920s. In a letter it was pointed out that purchase of the farm would, at the current interest rate of five percent, cost £330 *p.a.* against the rent at the time of £410. This implied a purchase price of £6600, whereas the owner had stated that he would have been looking for £7500 elsewhere. The sale particulars recorded that there were *c.* 148

acres of arable, 17 acres of water meadow (the separate part to the east), and the remaining 178 acres were grazing.²²² Thus the farm was a typical mixed farm, which would have grown wheat, barley and oats. There were no records for the war years, but in line with other farmers, it is a reasonable assumption that Richardson made good money during the second part of the War and into 1919 and 1920. In the absence of any other information, it must be assumed that this had been invested and had become available for the purchase of the farm in 1927. The family hold a number of bank books which start in 1920, with a deposit account book from 1937. The 1920 book probably marked the start of a bank account, which seems to have been opened with £25. Presumably, the business was ‘all cash’ before that date. The change in the year-end balance has been used to derive a cash profit. The apparent profit or loss, for the entire period for which records exist, is shown in Figure 4.50, with a trend line which shows an improving profit position, albeit with a dip in 1929-1931.

Figure 4.50: *Cotterstock Lodge Farm, apparent cash profit, 1921-1939*



The wages book recorded seven employees up until 1928, and five from 1930 (information for 1929 was missing). As has been noted elsewhere, it had been necessary

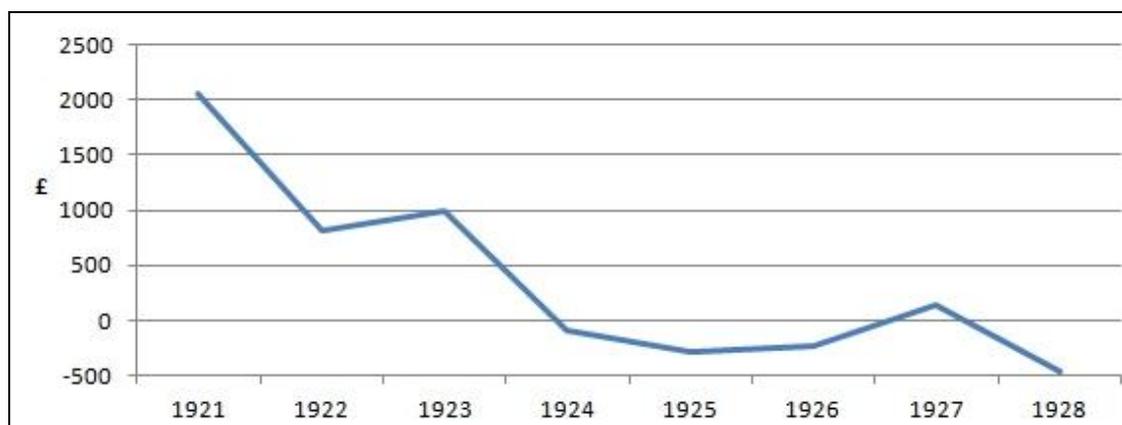
²²² The National Farm Survey, carried out in July 1941, shows the farm to be 379 acres, with an additional holding of 150 acres at Boars Head which was ‘taken as extra grazing a few years ago’, see TNA, MAF 32/940/196.

to reduce staff levels at the end of the 1920s but, in addition, there was evidence that the farm had its own tractor. This operation made almost no money in the 1920s, but there are no obvious trends evident from this operation.

Hazell family farms at Shotesham in Norfolk

Shotesham is a village lying five miles due south of Norwich. Records for this operation spanned the period 1921-1936. Very little information about the farming operation was provided with this deposit either at MERL or in the TNA reference.²²³ Cash books were for Old Hall Farm and Winters Farm, Shotesham, Norfolk. It appeared that the farm was bought in 1921, the first account book having reported that there was a balance of £9798 to be paid. In the first four months some £8500 of sales of cattle, pigs, barley, hay and straw took place, so this farm was bought as a going concern. It was a mixed operation with some dairy. The surpluses or losses that have been deduced show that, after the period of deflation, there was continuous deterioration, as shown in Figure 4.51.

Figure 4.51: *Surplus at the farms of the Hazell family at Shotesham in Norfolk, 1921-1936*

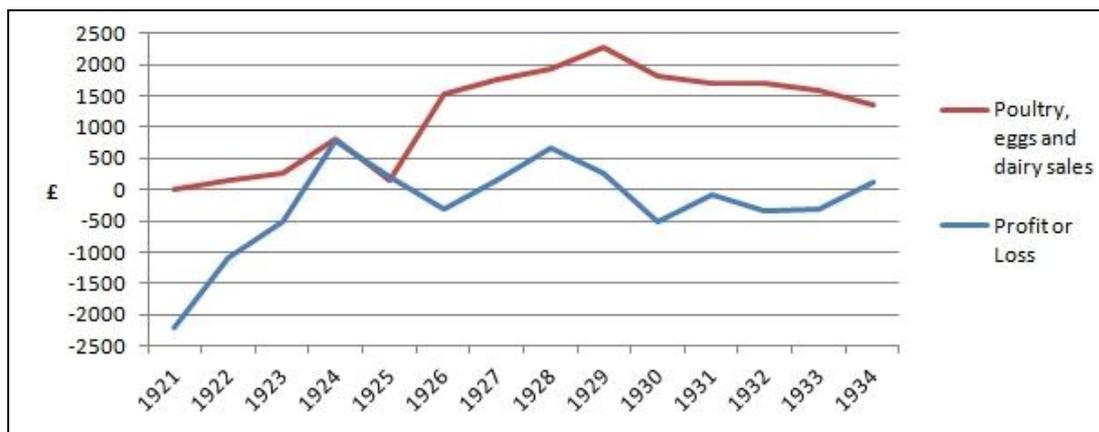


²²³ <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/a2a/records.aspx?cat=007-norf11&cid=1-10#1-10>. MERL NORF 11/1/4 to 11/1/8, 1921-1938 [accessed 24 October 2013].

Lewin family farms at Horningsea in Cambridgeshire

The donor's family were established farmers in Huntingdonshire and Leicestershire, who had moved to Cambridgeshire at the turn of the century. In 1918 they re-located to Horningsea, a small village some three miles to the north-east of Cambridge.²²⁴ The records are a rare case of professionally produced true profit and loss accounts with valuations, as shown in Figure 4.52. It was understood that the figures related to two farms, St John's Farm of 250-300 acres, farmed on fen alluvium to heavy loam and as a tenant to St John's College, Cambridge; and Northfields Farm, also 250-300 acres, on similar soil conditions and again tenanted.²²⁵

Figure 4.52: *Profits at the farm of the Lewin family at Horningsea, 1921-1934*



Lewin decided to move into substantial dairy farming from 1926 but, despite this, from 1923-1934, the cumulative profit figures show break-even.

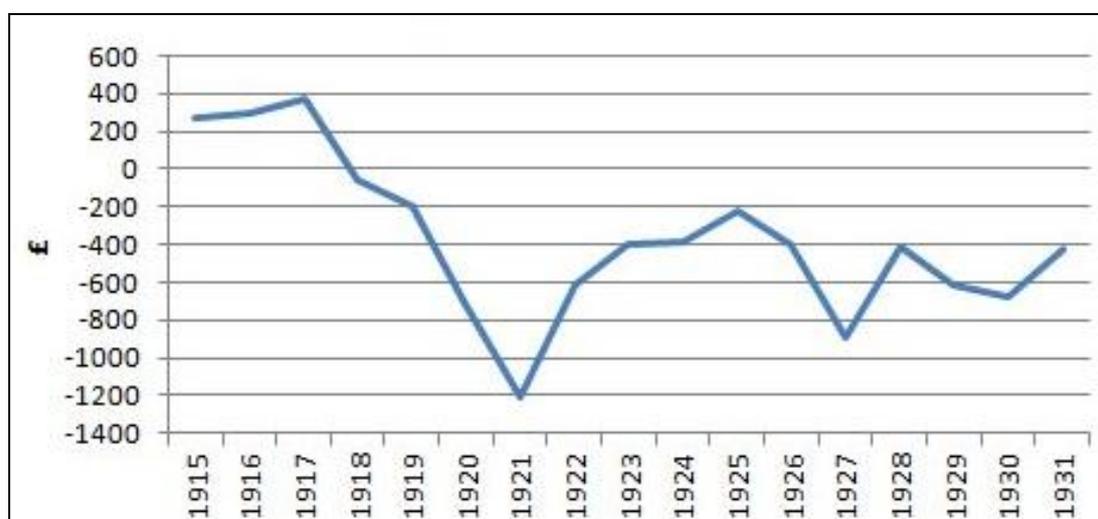
²²⁴ MERL CAM 2/1/2-2/1/14. File has a MERL note saying 'This is one of the easiest accounts in our possession. Very few farms had an annual valuation'.

²²⁵ <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/a2a/records.aspx?cat=007-cam2&cid=-1#-1> [accessed 24 October 2013].

Pitt Hall Estate, Hampshire

This estate was located in the village of Ramsdell in Hampshire, 4 miles north-west of Basingstoke. Records for the estate farm cover the period 1915-1931. This is another case of the in-hand farming sideline being a very real drain on the estate, as shown in Figure 4.53.

Figure 4.53: *Profit/Loss at Pitt Hall Farm, Hampshire, 1915-1931*



The deposit donor's father (a solicitor practising in London) purchased the Estate in 1898 primarily for sporting purposes.²²⁶ Acreage was recorded as varying between 250 and 1500 acres, farmed on flinty clay on chalk. The farm was worked intensively up to the end of the Great War, but thereafter deteriorated until the depositor acquired the property in 1932, presumably on the death of his father. There is no indication as to what happened to the misfortunes of this farming operation after the son took it over in 1932. It is now farmed as part of the Kingsclere Estate.²²⁷

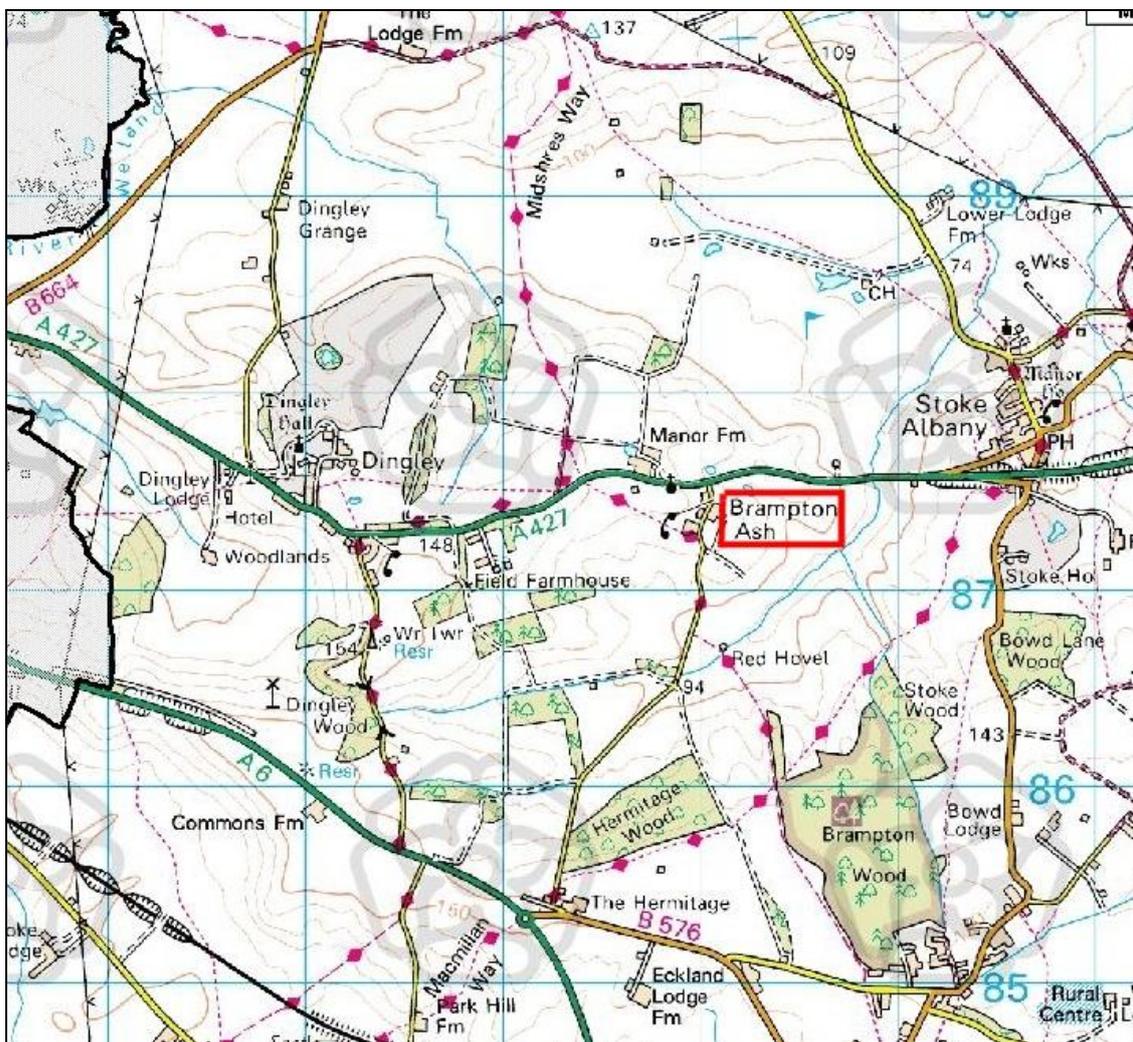
²²⁶ MERL HAN 6/1/1 to 6/1/3. <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/a2a/records.aspx?cat=007-han6&cid=-1#-1> [accessed 24 October 2013].

²²⁷ <http://www.kingsclere-estates.co.uk/farming.html> [accessed 24 October 2013]

Brampton Ash, Northamptonshire

At the northern end of Northamptonshire, just to the east of Market Harborough, as shown on the map in Figure 4.54, was a farm called either Brampton Farm or Brampton Ash. This was tenanted by H. R. Overman from Earl Spencer. Inspection of the locality showed this to be south of the Welland valley on uplands.

Figure 4.54: *Location of Brampton Ash, east of Market Harborough*



Overman's operation was that of a mixed farm with an element of wheat and other arable products. The deposited records gave no indication of the farm size.²²⁸ Unfortunately the

²²⁸ Norfolk RO, BR 118/102 to BR118/107 inclusive, and BR 118/130.

4 June returns covered the entire parish and there were no individual farm records.²²⁹

Within the parish the 1921 record showed there to be nine individual holdings, all tenanted. From these, it has been deduced that there were two holdings which, together, covered over 1100 acres, so it was likely that one of these was Overman's holding. From information about the farming operation in the deposit, it has been estimated at 720 acres as shown in Table 4.5.

Table 4.5: *Estimation of the farm size of Brampton Ash*

	Approx no.	Density, say	Acres
Cows	300	1 per acre	300
Ewes/lambs	800	5 per acre	160
Corn	£1340	See below	50
Hay		See below	150
Pigs	600	10 per acre	60
Total			720

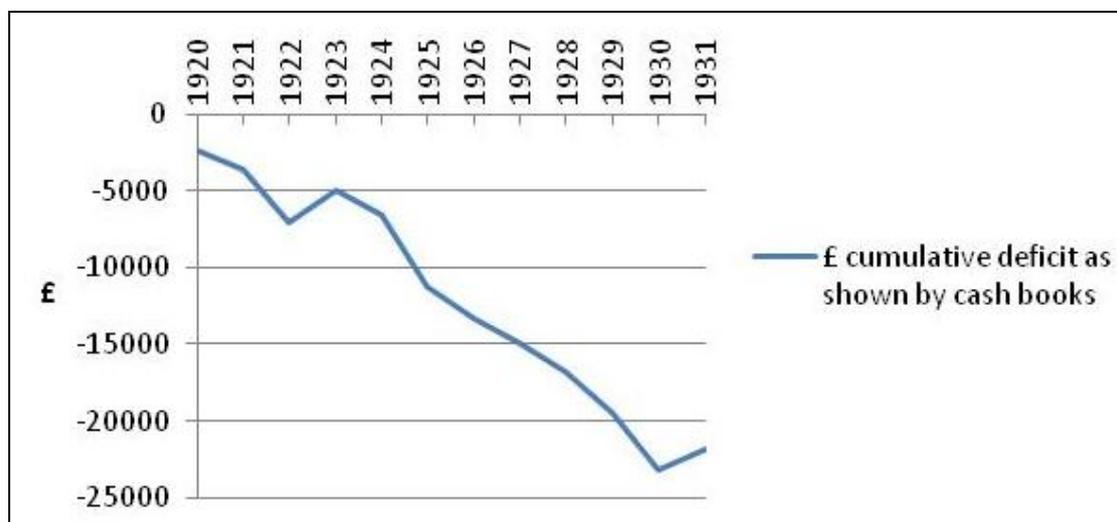
The records held at the Norfolk RO commenced with the year ending 11 October 1920, and covered years up to 1931, which are all dealt with in this chapter. The key records were three payments cash books, which ran until the year ending 11 October 1931, and a single sales cash book in which the last year recorded was that ending 11 October 1928.

Other records showed that Overman was a member of the Clipston and District Agricultural and Horticultural Society; that he used the London and Midland and Scottish Railway Company for transportation of farming products, and that he shot at the Rockingham Castle Estate. The cash books showed a sizeable operation at the commencement of the period for which records were held (1919-1920), but a very much

²²⁹ Pers. comm. TNA, (6 September 2012). A copy of the 4 June Returns for the district for 4 June 1921 was obtained and showed that the Parish acreage was shown, without farm-by-farm detail. TNA confirmed that no farm records remain in existence.

reduced one by the end of the period in 1930-1931. This is reflected in the growth of the deficit shown in Figure 4.55.

Figure 4.55: *Brampton Ash Farm growth in annual deficit, 1920-1931*



Figures 4.56 and 4.57 give some detail of the retrenchment in terms of his livestock operations. The first shows that he withdrew entirely from buying cattle in 1922 and 1923, while continuing to sell down his stock. The second shows that he almost gave up buying any ewes in 1921, but was back in the market in 1922.

Figure 4.56: *Value of cattle bought and sold at Brampton Ash, 1920-1928*

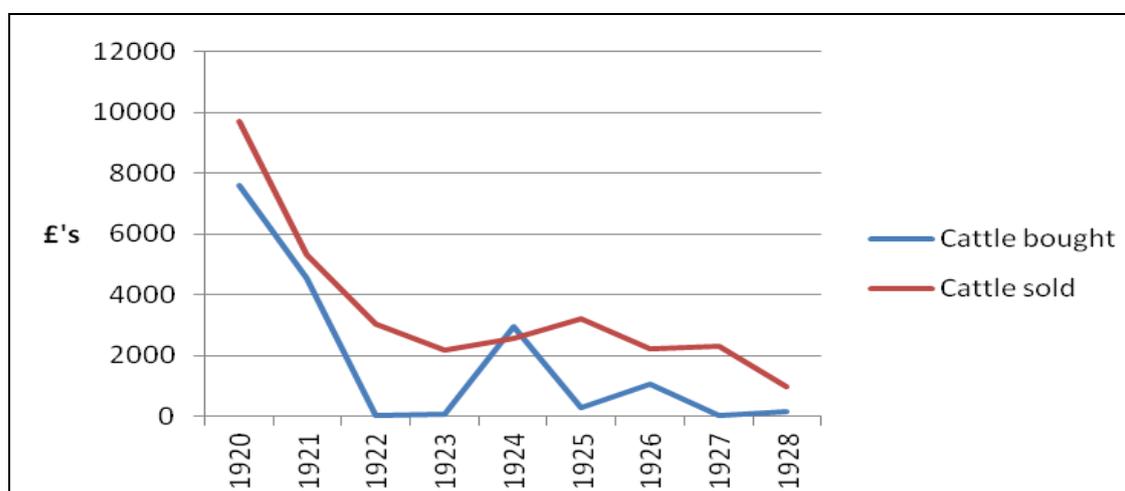
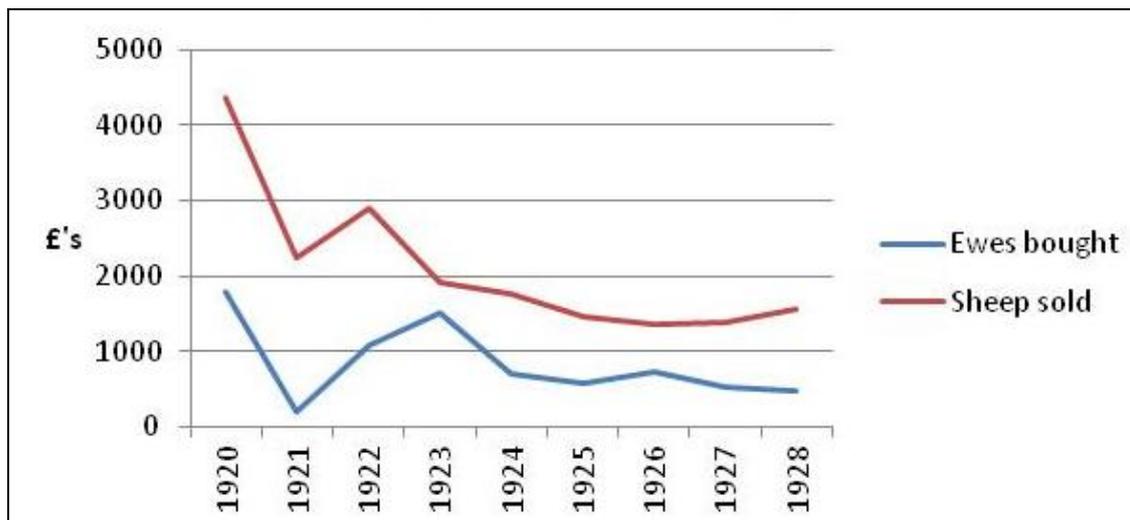
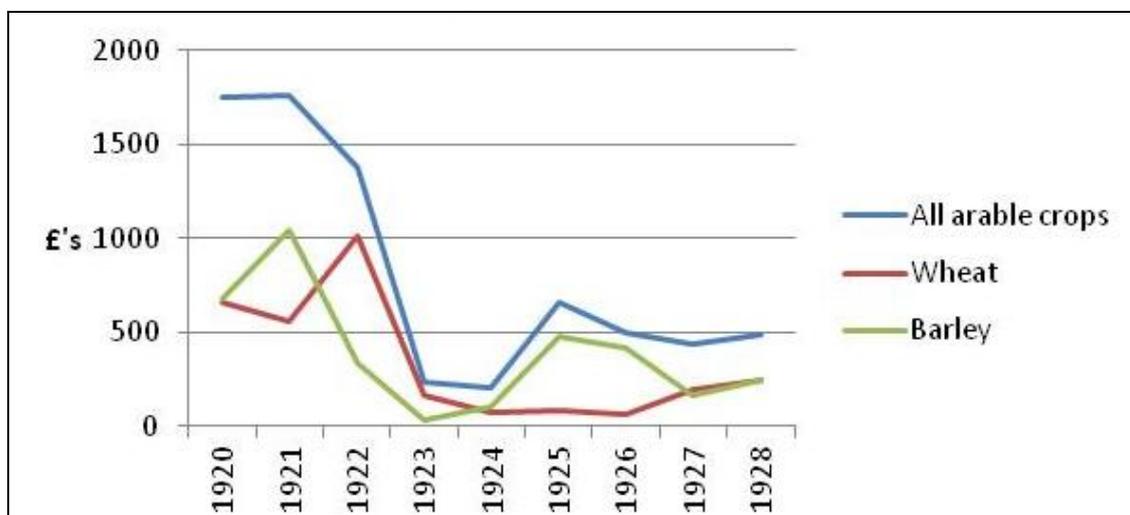


Figure 4.57: Value of sheep bought and sold at Brampton Ash, 1920-1928



From Figure 4.58, it can be seen that he also retrenched his arable operations very significantly, reducing these to very low levels of production and income in 1923 and 1924.

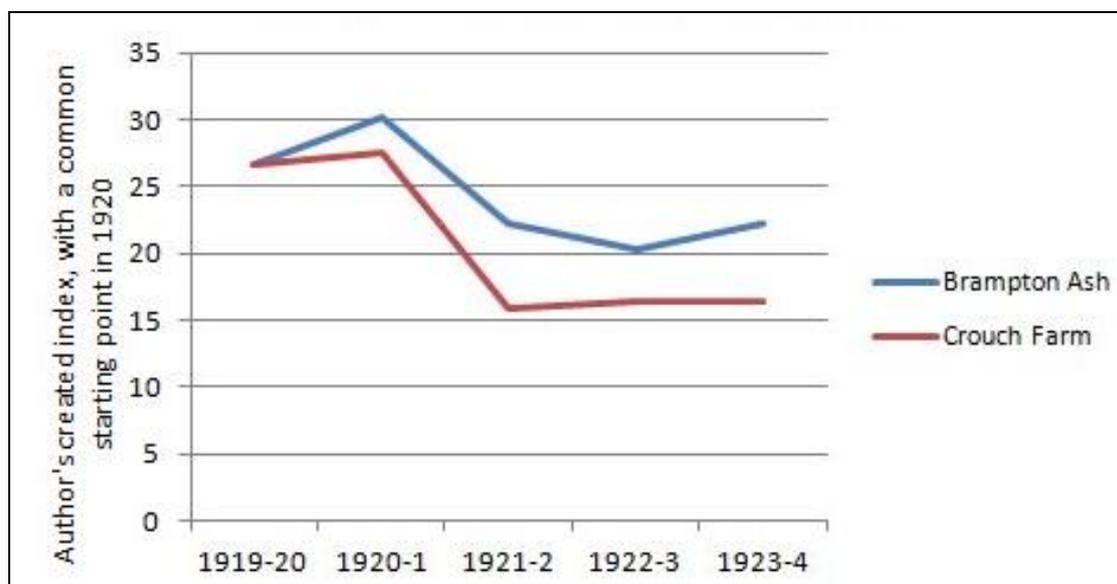
Figure 4.58: Value of arable at Brampton Ash, 1920-1928



A comparison of his operations compared to Crouch Farm provides further insight into the operations at Brampton Ash. In 1920, Overman's receipts from corn were almost exactly the same as that of Gibbard at Crouch Farm, and the mix between wheat and barley also the same, with both approximating to half of the total corn production. In

1925 as shown in Figure 4.19 page 158, Gibbard returned 90 acres of arable made up of 50 acres of corn, 30 acres of hay and 10 acres of roots. The corn acreage at Brampton Ash was estimated at the same level. However, Overman had a very much large number of both cattle and sheep, with 300 cattle as against Gibbard's holding, which varied between 30 and 60. So the hay area was estimated at five times that of Crouch Farm. Gibbard's wage bill that year was £495, while Overman's was £2660. If the farm was 720 acres, compared with Gibbard's 165 acres, the wage ratio between the two might suggest that Overman's bill was relatively too high, particularly as his labour intensive arable was a much lower percentage than Gibbard's, and he had not yet gone into dairying. This over-manning, similar to Stilgoe's operation at Adderbury referred to in the next chapter, might have been a result of his land being more difficult to farm. Even taking this into account, the index of his wage bill from a common starting point in 1920 showed that this relatively higher manning cost (compared to that of Gibbard at Crouch Farm) was exacerbated in the next four years, as shown in Figure 4.59.

Figure 4.59: *Brampton Ash and Crouch Farm wages 1920-1924 indexed from a common starting point*



Further analysis suggests the following conclusions, albeit these are speculative. From 1919-1920 (when records were first available), it seems that Overman was running an unviable and over-manned operation with the figures telling of a very high repair and renewal programme, due perhaps to him having only just taken over a run-down farm.

In 1921-1922, Overman withdrew temporarily from the cattle fattening business, due to price volatility, and did not acquire new stock, as shown in Figure 4.56, page 192.

Gibbard had reacted similarly, but he only stayed out of the market for one year, while Overman stayed out for two years, thus further interrupting his cash flow from this source. In the early 1920s, after the period of deflation, Overman appears to have taken the advice that was on offer from the Ministry of Agriculture, and diversified into dairying and later a more extensive pig operation, and withdrew to a very large extent from arable corn operations. On the other hand, Gibbard stayed with what he knew, eschewing the advice, and found that the cattle price, which had only fallen by about one-third, was one of the most resilient of the agricultural product sectors. So, it appears to have been a combination of an unviable business, the 'wrong' decisions in 1922-1923, and perhaps more difficult land requiring more manpower that caused Overman's business to spiral into ever-increasing debt, as shown in Figure 4.55, page 192. The deposited records suggest that H. R. Overman moved out of the farmhouse in 1929 as he rented 'The Cottage' from Earl Spencer that year, and at Michaelmas 1929 there was an evaluation of his holding and at 11 October 1930 a valuation of livestock related to a transfer of the business from him to a relation, R. H. Overman.²³⁰ The detail of this seemed to suggest that a much reduced acreage was by then being farmed, but this cannot be confirmed.

²³⁰ Norfolk RO, BR 118/102 to BR118/107 inclusive, and BR 118/130. Pers. comm. Bruce Bailey, archivist at Althorp, (various dates).

Blakesley Village Farm, Northamptonshire

There are records from a farm called The Poplars in Blakesley, near Towcester in Northamptonshire, and the entry in the records at MERL stated:

475 acres in 1939 when J. Shepherd owned 210 acres and rented the rest mainly from a Mrs Bartholemew. Earlier (in about 1910) the acreage was probably smaller with minimal owner-occupation and land again rented from Mrs Bartholomew.²³¹

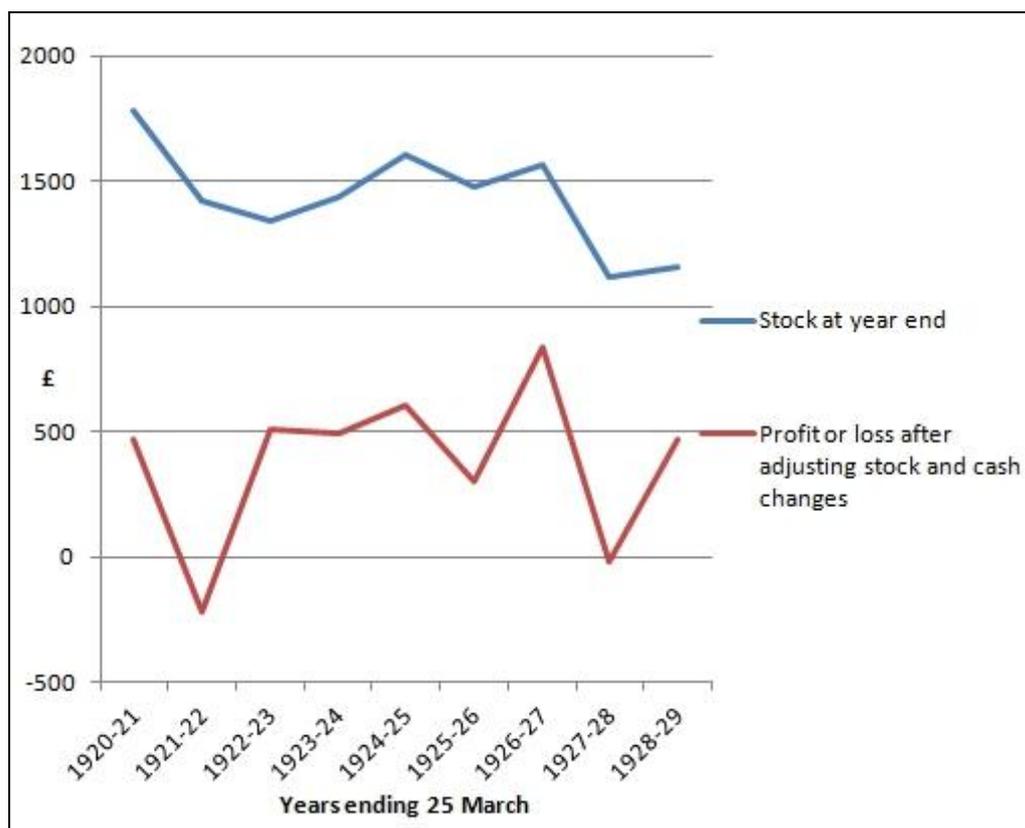
The records were deposited in 1966 by Mr Heygate of Bugbrooke Mills on behalf of Mr Shepherd of Blakesley, and cover the period 1921-1929. It may be that Mr Heygate had acquired the interest in this or these farms at that time.²³² However, it was not clear whether the records from 1920-1921 to 1928-1929, and then from 1934-1935 to 1938-1939 related to The Poplars Farm or perhaps to Elms Farm, also in Blakesley.²³³ For this reason, no map is shown of the farm. In the back of the farm account book of 1924-1925, as deposited, was a separate sheet which records the valuation of a farm of 140 acres. While it remains circumstantial, it is not unreasonable to assume that the bulk of the records refer to Elms Farm, originally 125 acres when acquired for £3250 in 1919, but later expanded to 140 acres. It is not known whether a mortgage was raised for the purchase and, if so, whether the annual interest payable at some 7 percent and amounting perhaps to £250 was included in the figures. The information recorded was restricted to stock and cash at the year end, but this has been used to create a profit or loss position after adjustment for the change in stock during the year, shown in Figure 4.60.

²³¹MERL, Northam4. <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/a2a/records.aspx?cat=007-northam4&cid=0#0> [accessed 20 June 2012 and 30 October 2013].

²³² Pers. comm. with Mr R Heygate, (25 June 2012) was unable to resolve this matter. The family own Heygates, a flour and grain business in Northamptonshire, and may have acquired farms as a source for its raw materials in its early days.

²³³ NRO, SC106, SC 233, Mr Sheppard, possibly the same family with a different spelling, was possibly the buyer of 125 acre Elms Farm at Blakesley ahead of the 1919 Grafton auction.

Figure 4.60: *Stock and Profit-and-Loss on a farm at Blakesley, 1921-1929*



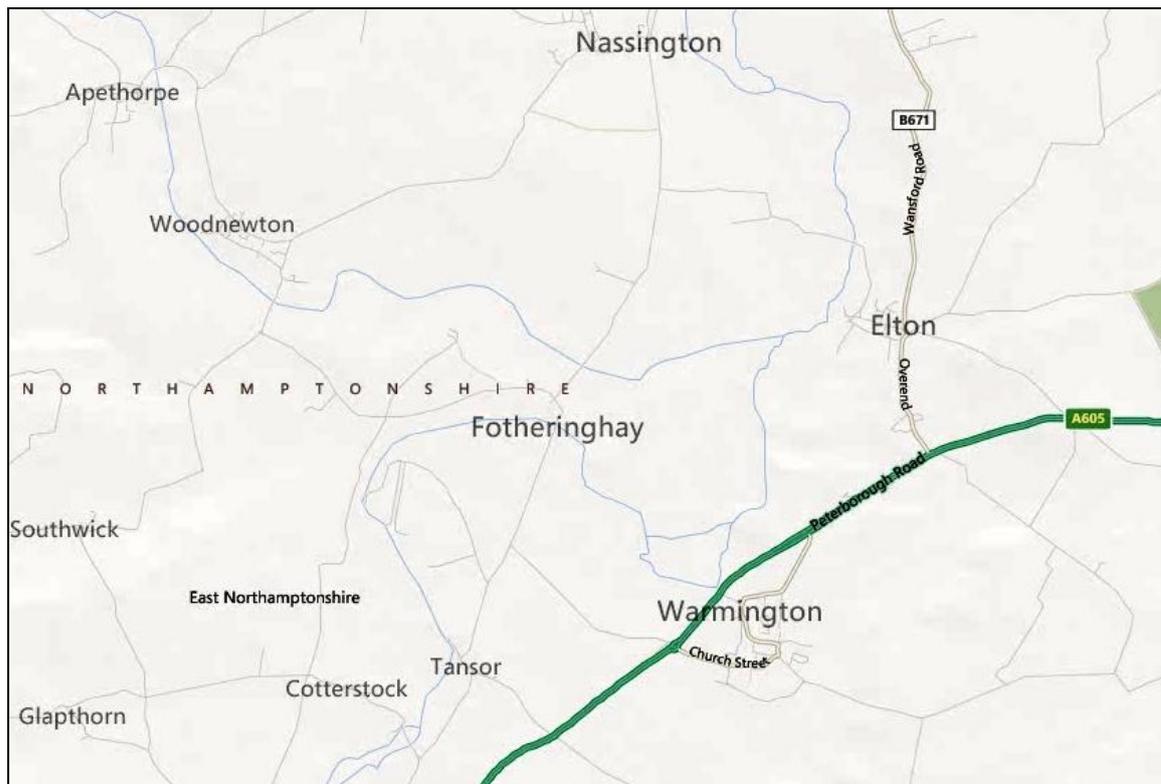
Similar to Gibbard at Crouch Farm, there was just a one-year downturn in 1922, but with even less reduction in stock. The records show that Sheppard weathered the rapid deflation relatively easily, and then experienced a period of stagnation. However, the business remained profitable from 1923-1927.

Elton Hall, Northamptonshire

This estate, still owned by the Proby family, straddles the Northamptonshire and Cambridge (Huntingdon district) borders, as shown in Figure 4.61, and comprises c. 3800 acres.²³⁴ In this case, records covered the period 1919-1928.

²³⁴ Estate and farming records of Elton Hall by kind permission of Sir William Proby, accessed with the help of the archivist Jenny Burt. There are very extensive estate and family records, which are in the process of being catalogued, but most of the records accessed were from uncatalogued boxes.

Figure 4.61: *General location of Elton Hall in Northamptonshire*

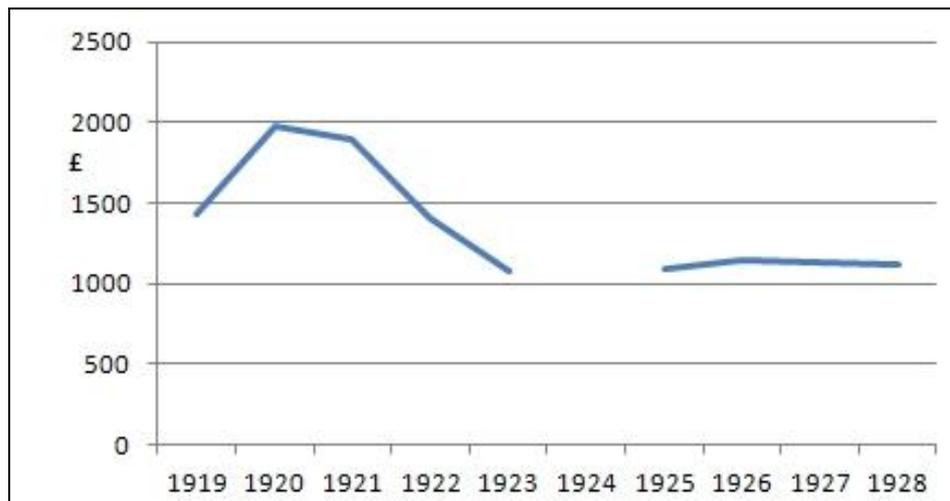


There was a poor-condition map from 1921, which showed that farms in-hand totalled c. 816 acres, a figure supported by a statement in a 1921 report which stated that ‘the floating capital may be reckoned at £7000 or approximately £8 10s 0d per acre’. This amount of direct farming involvement is unusual for an estate of this size, but the Proby family were keen and interested farmers.

In his 1921 report the agent, Gerald Hubbard, noted that most of these farms had been taken over from outgoing tenants and were ‘in very bad heart’ and that ‘ploughing up of certain grasslands, by order of the War Agricultural Committees had resulted in a dead loss’. The very dry summer of 1921 had taken its toll; ‘the grass is burnt brown and the ground cracked and hard as iron; the roots had mostly failed; and the stock were not getting a very good living’. The records gave no indication of the acreage in-hand after 1921 until extant Estate 4 June Returns start in 1932, and this is referred to in Chapter 5,

page 287. However the pattern of wage payments suggested that the acreage remained fairly constant over the period shown in Figure 4.62, with the higher figures from 1919-1922 reflecting the pattern of agricultural wages for that period.

Figure 4.62: *Elton Hall wage bill for farms in-hand, 1919-1928*



The difficulties of the period of deflation soon after the end of the Great War were summarised in a bundle of papers called ‘papers dealing with the difficulties of 1921-1922’. The agent reported on 24 and 25 February 1922 that the overdraft facility of £5000 was secure only until 20 May that year, but his forecast was that the overdraft would range between £4100 and £4300 for the year. On 28 June 1922, Colonel Proby wrote to the agent saying that he was ‘hanging on by the skin of my teeth’ and that he might have to sell a large part of the estate, adding praise for the agent’s efforts and urging him personally to look for other opportunities.

There were ledgers for the farming operation, but these have only been found up to April 1929. They showed receipts and expenditure on an actual basis with notional figures added in at the year-end for rent and other payment and receipt items, so as to represent

as true a position on a proper profit-and-loss footing, as shown in Figure 4.63, with opening and closing stock, debtors and creditors shown.²³⁵

Figure 4.63: *Profit record of Elton Hall farms in-hand, 1919-1928*



An item in the agent's report suggests that sales of dairy produce, poultry and bacon which are 'marketed at the mansion' may not be properly included. No cash was clearly passing back into the farming business from these sales with the agent claiming that 'it was impossible to set aside any portion of the profits to purchase manures or additional stock' as a result. Notwithstanding this, there was a very significant change with the profit of £814 in 1920 giving way to a loss of £2711 in 1921, with £854 of the £3525 reversal being accounted for by the reduction in stock value. The remainder was accounted for by a drop of some £2500 in revenues, shown in Table 4.6, offset by £850 reductions in expenses. Most of the reduction in income can be put down to the deflation in prices.

²³⁵ The farming account figures for 1919-1928, shown in Figure 4.64, are based on accounting periods of the calendar year up until December 1922, after which it changed to the end of April, so the first four months of 1923 are not included in the graphs so as to give a proper comparison of 12 month periods.

Table 4.6: *Changes in categories of farming income at Elton Hall, 1920-1921*

	1920	1921
Grass keep	617	451
Sheep, lambs	534	219
Cattle	1107	492
Wheat	1196	725
Oats	215	
Provisions for the house	1547	882
Sub-total	5216	2769
Other income	869	802
Total income	6085	3571

Contribution to the improvement in 1922 came from a receipt of £432 in respect of government subsidy on corn; a reduction of some £500 in wages; but with these offset by the purchase of a tractor costing £385 in 1921, portrayed in Figure 4.64.²³⁶

Figure 4.64: *Garner tractor, similar to that bought by Elton Hall for £385*



The choice of this particular model was probably swayed by this review a year earlier:

The tractor I liked best in the Class 2 tests was the Garner. It stood well up to its work and travelled at a good steady pace. The result of its work was good, the

²³⁶ The image was sourced from the internet rather than the estate records.

furrow being of good depth and width, well turned up and very straight. It was very easily managed at the ends, the only trouble being that the Ruston plough gave occasional trouble with the trip arrangement on the self-lift appliance. The sectional detachable rubber tyres of the Garner are the most effective of such equipment. They are brined in four sections per wheel, which form of tread provides sufficient traction to plough two furrows 10 ins. wide by 7-ins. deep in stiff clay land when the land is comparatively dry. The judges paid much attention to these sectional detachable rubber tyres.²³⁷

Aside from in-hand farming, Table 4.7 shows little progressive benefit from renting other farmland, with only a 17 percent increase in the rents in 1922 compared with the pre-war figure, and this increase was under pressure from tenants in the second half of the 1920s and more so in the 1930s.²³⁸

Table 4.7: A selection of Elton Hall rents comparing 1922 and 1927 with pre-war levels

Selected tenants and rents	Acres	Pre-war rent	1922	1927?
Fray	157.5	188	188	175
Howell	40.5	74.5	74.5	74.5
Hunter	550	428	578	578
Martin	75	50	60	60
Sanders (3 tenancies)	506	526.5	562	562
Stapleton	308	200	250	250
Coles	318.5	305	410	410
Horsford	202	160.8	200	200
Moisey	205	175.65	195	177
Stokes	318	453	494	408
TOTAL	2622.5	2561.45	3011.5	2894.5
Rent/acre		0.98	1.15	1.1

²³⁷ 'The Lincoln tractor trials', *The Commercial Motor*, 12th October 1920

²³⁸ There is an undated schedule from which these figures are derived but it must be 1927 or later as the Stokes reduction is noted to have been made at Lady Day 1927. The figures are also supported by the rent ledgers.

The correspondence files recorded that Stokes, tenant of Home Farm and Eaglethorpe Farm, had written to the estate advising that he had lost £366 in 1924 and £781 in 1925; that Moisey of Bates Lodge Farm had complained in 1925 that he could not go on any more; that Fray, tenant of three farms, had sought a reduction in 1928; and that these tenants were successful in obtaining a reduction. This did not always solve the problem, and Stokes, with huge arrears, was forced to quit his farm soon after his reduction, and Sanders quit Rectory and Furze farms in 1928, leaving him with just Stoney Farm.

Horsford had told his landlord that he was bringing his son into Villa Farm in 1924. However, bad times were just round the corner for, in June 1927, Horsford was asking for time to pay until the lambs were sold, and reported that 'the boy' had lost £500 since starting on his own. He referred to the increased rent of some £40 in 1922 'when times were good', and asked that he might go back to the old rent, a plea that fell on the deaf ears of the agent. With no movement, Horsford served notice to quit Villa Farm from Lady Day 1929, stating that the family had lost £200 every year for the last three. The correspondence then turned bitter with the tenant, who had first rented from the Proby family in 1897, asking to offset some of his debt by the improvements that he had made over the years. Horsford's son, who had taken on Villa Farm, did not manage to get his rent down. However, it did not take long to replace these two tenants. So, while some farmers were finding it impossible to make money and were throwing over their farms, others were ready to take on the challenge.

Figure 4.63, page 200, showed that in-hand farming went into the red from 1921, a trend found with the other large estate in this thesis although there was, in this case, a brief move back into profit in 1924. Despite the bad times of the 1920s, the Elton estate

managed to avoid a flood of rent reductions, but this was not to continue so lightly in the 1930s, as will be seen in Chapter 5, page 322.

Elmfield Farm at Potterspur, Northamptonshire

Potterspur is located on the A5 about 6 miles south of Towcester. The Soper family of Potterspur was another family found by this research to have acquired a farm from the Duke of Grafton's estate around 1920, and to have survived to the present day similar to Cozens, who was referred to on pages 130-131 in this chapter and who farmed at Roade.²³⁹ James Soper, the grandfather of the present incumbent, John Soper, had moved to Whittlebury before the Great War and leased Lords Field Farm from the Duke of Grafton. As the tenant, he had been offered this farm for £5000 before auction on 14 October 1919, but refused it, and was presumably then given notice to quit by the buyer. Elmfield Farm in Potterspur came up for sale at auction on 4 December 1920 but failed to sell.²⁴⁰

However, after the auction James Soper acquired it for £6250.²⁴¹ Presumably he gave the tenant notice for it appears that he started farming here in 1921, with his previous cash book having ceased in the middle of that year. In discussion, Soper referred to his grandfather as being 'reasonably affluent', and other evidence has suggested that he had made good surpluses in his time at Whittlebury during the Great War, but nevertheless he needed a loan to acquire Elmfield Farm. With no extant cash book, it was not possible to see what steps he had taken between 1921 and 1924, when a new cash book showed a balance brought forward of £482 with other documents suggesting that Soper still had a

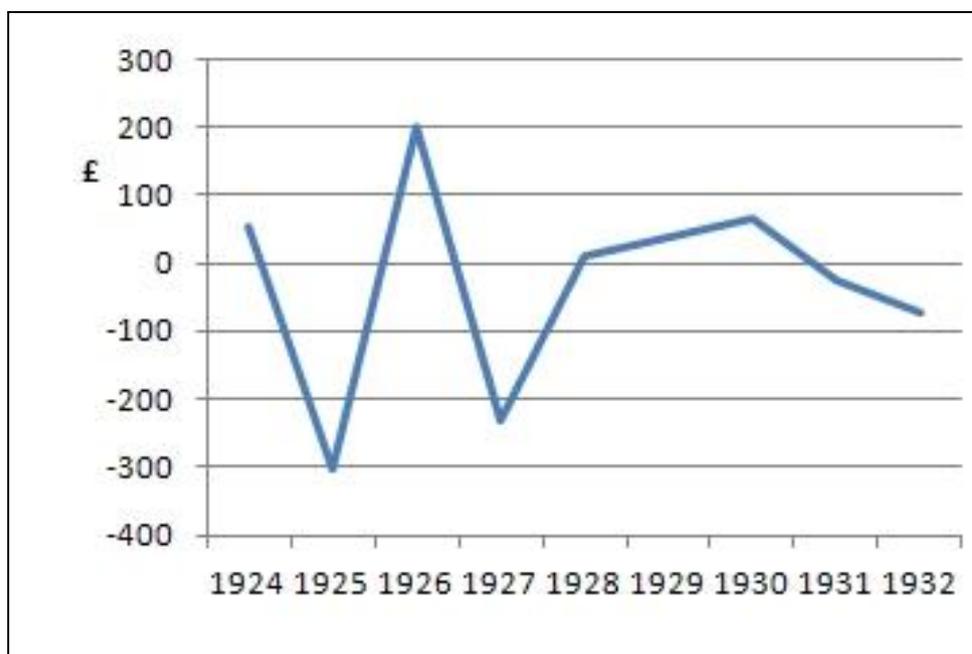
²³⁹ Pers. comm. J. Soper, (3 October 2012 *et seq.*).

²⁴⁰ NRO, SC 265. It was Lot 82 comprising 231 acres and tenanted to a Mr Gregory.

²⁴¹ NRO, G3938/5, letter dated 15 December 1920.

bank loan, probably around £4000, repaying annually part capital and interest. The farm was mixed at that time (in 2012 it was mainly arable with some sheep), and valuations showed that Soper kept dairy cows and other cattle, sheep, pigs, poultry, and had stocks of ‘cultivations’ in each valuation. He had also kept between eight and ten horses. Figure 4.65 shows the year-on-year cash change derived from the cash book.²⁴²

Figure 4.65: *Cash change year-on-year, 1924-1932, at Elmfield Farm, Potterspury*



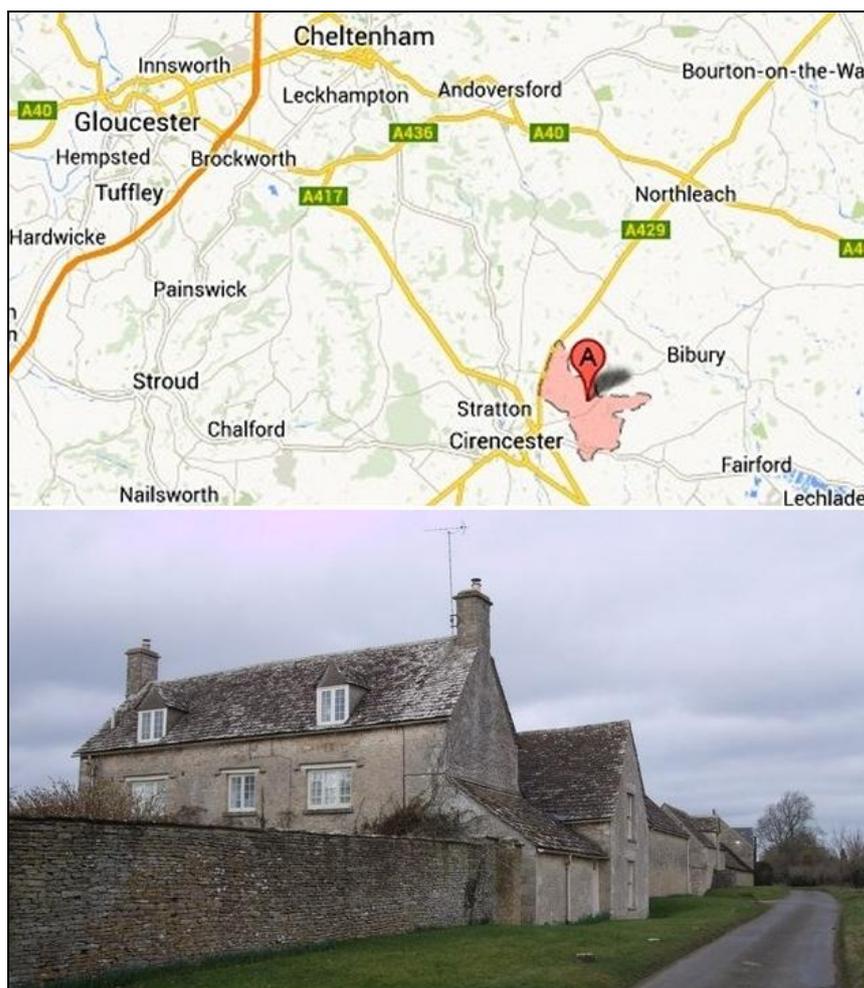
There were also valuations as at 5 April for 1924 and 1927 to 1929, which generally confirmed the overall trend of cash book losses of £261 for the 10 year period. It would appear that the period 1924-1932 was a difficult one; that there was a one-year upturn in 1926; and that the period 1928-1932 was stagnant. As the family are still farming here, the Soper family had enough other collateral, built up from farming operations in the Great War, to carry the bank loan throughout the difficult period of the 1920s and 1930s.

²⁴² Personal records of John Soper.

Ampney Sheephouse Farm, Gloucestershire

This farm was located to the north-east of Cirencester in Gloucestershire, as shown in Figure 4.66 with a photograph of the farmhouse²⁴³

Figure 4.66: *Location of Ampney Crucis and photograph of Ampney Sheephouse Farm*



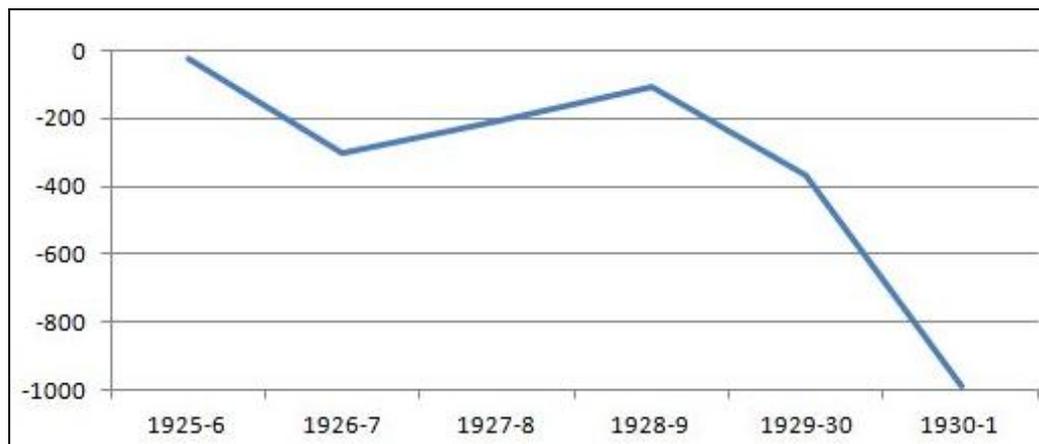
The records did not divulge the size of the farm, although the account book for 1926-1927 showed 144 acres of arable.²⁴⁴ Comparison with Crouch Farm suggested that this farm may have been around 200 acres. The first diary recorded operations for the year

²⁴³ Photograph is acknowledged to Geograph Project, and reproduced under the terms of their common licence, <http://www.geograph.org.uk/photo/2821482> [accessed 27 October 2013].

²⁴⁴ GRO, D6266/1/11-19, in particular GRO, D6266/1/13.

1918-1919, but this was incomplete, suggesting perhaps that this was a start-up.²⁴⁵ There was then a gap in the records which started again for the year 1925-1926 and this and subsequent years ran to mid October, ending in 1931. A loss was recorded in each of the years, and this is shown in Figure 4.67.

Figure 4.67: *Cash losses at Ampney Sheephouse Farm, 1925-1931*



In the penultimate year 1931-1932, not shown in the Figure, livestock sales were higher, suggesting that the operation was being run down. This interpretation is supported by a rough valuation of the farm, which was tucked into this account book.²⁴⁶ The final year, 1932-1933, showed wages only and one entry for the six-monthly rental, so this appeared to confirm that the operation was closed down. While there might have been other reasons, such as retirement, the losses suggest that this farmer had had enough and that the serious downturn of the early 1930s led to him giving up. As such, this is a valuable record, as it is suggestive of the early 1930s putting paid to this farming operation.

Internet entries suggest that all the buildings have been converted to residential units.²⁴⁷

²⁴⁵ GRO, D6266/1/11.

²⁴⁶ GRO, D6266/1/18.

²⁴⁷ <http://www.zoopla.co.uk/home-values/ampney-crucis/sheephouse-lane/> [accessed 8 August 2013].

Sibford Ferris, Oxfordshire

Sibford Ferris, about 6 miles west of Banbury in Oxfordshire and on the edge of the Cotswolds, is set at about 500 feet above sea level. Figure 4.68 shows an earlier painting of the farm and a current photograph of the farmhouse.²⁴⁸

Figure 4.68: *The Lamb family home in Sibford Ferris*

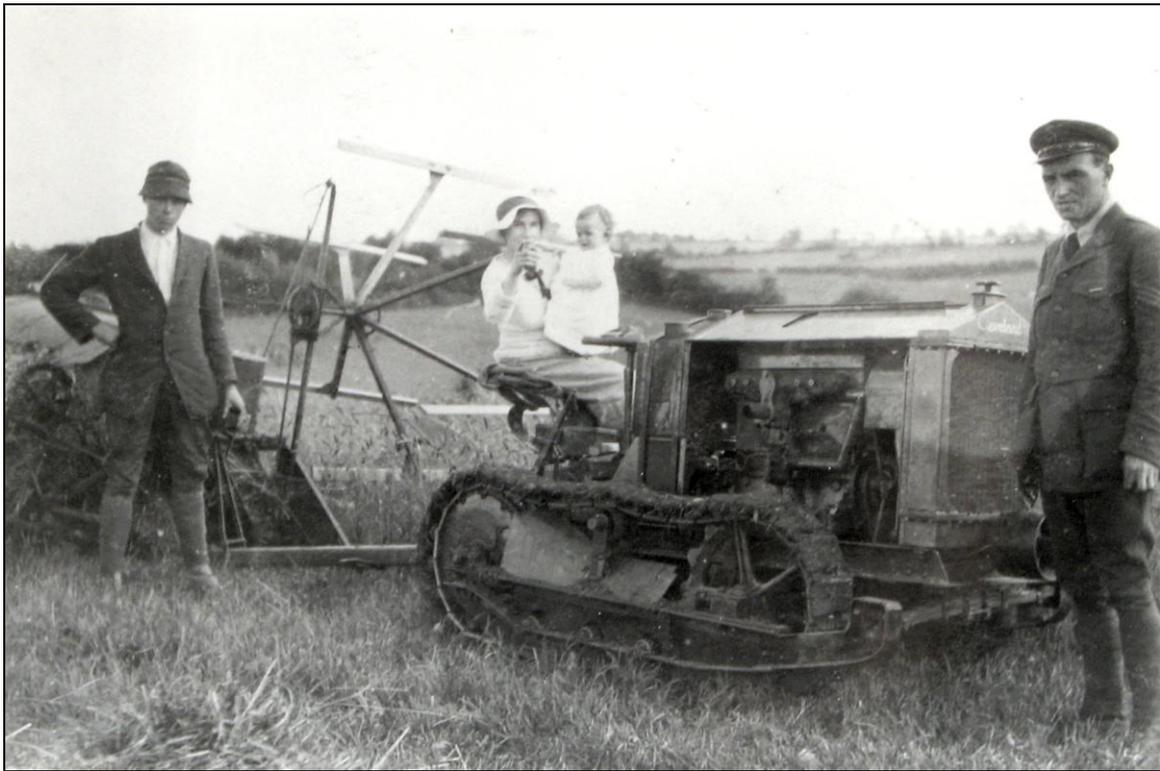


A farm of c. 600 acres was run here by the great grandparents of Ina and Arnold Lamb, the family having reportedly lived in the farmhouse since 1650. Their grandfather (they are cousins), Joshua Lamb, took over about half of this, c. 281 acres. The activities on the

²⁴⁸ Pers. comm. Ina and Arnold Lamb, (15 and 22 February 2014).

farm in the early part of 1920 confirmed this acreage, with about half the farm used for arable including potatoes, and half for cattle (fattening and dairy) and sheep. It was a relatively labour intensive operation, with some 11 staff employed in the early 1920s. Figure 4.69 is a family photograph with the 'Cletrac' tractor.

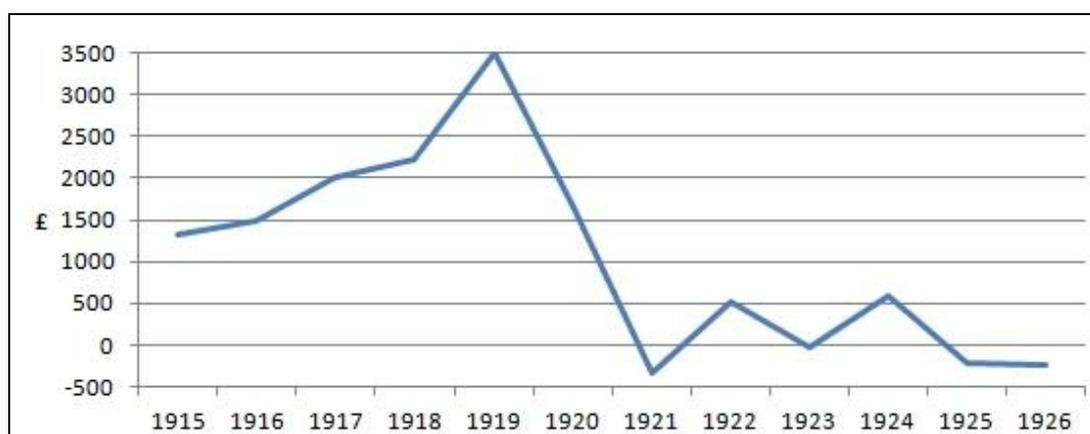
Figure 4.69: *The Lamb family Cleveland 'Cletrac' tractor with sons Bernard and Fred*



Joshua Lamb's cash book showed that he had made very good profits from 1915 onwards, paying off £2000 of loans. From 1918 he had invested money in War Loan, with £500 in 1918 and another £1000 in 1919. He had withdrawn all this to acquire the freehold of Field Barn Farm (c. 70 acres) in 1920 for some £2125 (at the high price of some £30 per acre), and Shortlands (c. 10 acres) in 1921 for £350. However, at the end of 1922, the business was transferred from Joshua Lamb to Joshua Lamb and Sons, bringing in sons Bernard and Fred shown in Figure 4.69. However, this arrangement appeared not to have been satisfactory because in April 1924, Joshua's two sons took over, at

valuation, 160 acres of Joshua's holding, and farmed this as Lamb Brothers. Their account book, which started from April 1924 and ran only for three years, was not on a comparative basis. Nevertheless Figure 4.70 shows how the fortunes of this farming operation changed for the worse from 1921 onwards.

Figure 4.70: *Profit from farming operations of the Lamb family at Sibford Ferris, 1915-1926*



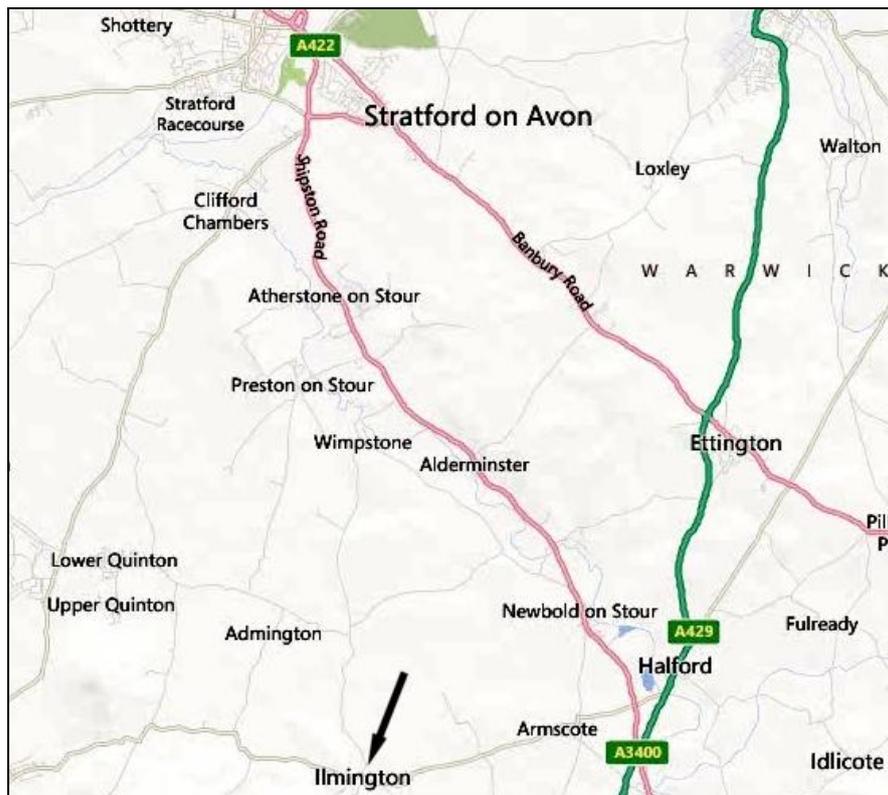
Like many other operations, they had made good profits in the war. But these profits then fell rapidly to the end of 1921 as the deflation of prices took hold.

Canning Howard family Foxcote estate in Ilmington, Warwickshire

An issue that was encountered in the research was the patchy nature of records that had survived, and this was exemplified by Philip Canning Howard's Foxcote estate in Ilmington, Warwickshire.²⁴⁹ The farm was located south of Stratford-upon-Avon, as shown in Figure 4.71.

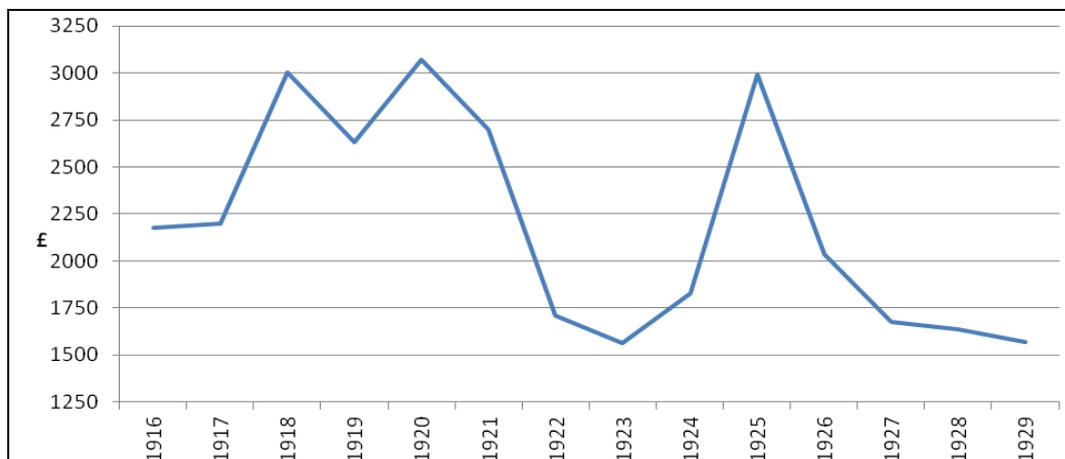
²⁴⁹ TNA, 'Papers concerning Philip J. Canning Howard's estate at Foxcote' <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/a2a/records.aspx?cat=187-cr1661&cid=20#20> [accessed 12 September 2012]. WRO, CR 1661/1205.

Figure 4.71: Location of Canning Howard's farm at Ilmington, Warwickshire



The shortcoming in these records is related to the fact that the account book showed only receipts after 1910, with expenditure no longer recorded. The receipts, which ran for periods to the middle of October and are shown in Figure 4.72, demonstrate very clearly the drop in turnover resulting from the 1921-1922 deflation.

Figure 4.72: Canning Howard's farm receipts 1916-1929



They also showed that there appeared to have been a one-year attempt to raise the level of activity in the period ended October 1925 by almost doubling the turnover of ‘beasts’ to some £1900. An upturn in the middle of the decade, as shown in Figure 4.72, was also found from other farm studies, as shown in Table 4.9 on page 222.

Islip Lodge, Northamptonshire

The location of this farm in Northamptonshire is shown in Figure 4.73. At 240 acres, it was part of the Althorp Drayton Estate, and was tenanted to Sidney Holmes, grandfather to the present incumbent Richard Holmes.²⁵⁰

Figure 4.73: *Location of Islip Lodge*



²⁵⁰ Details from the Estate ledger have been obtained by Pers. comm. with Bruce Bailey, archivist to the Estate, (25 October and 9 November 2012). These details are confusing, introducing the name Hawkings Clement as the possible tenant from 1918-1928, after which this name disappears. Speculatively, it may be that he was the guarantor, and that in 1929 he ceased to guarantee, at the time when Holmes retrenched. Pers. comm. R. Holmes, (July to November 2012) and loan of dairies and other account books. Richard was the son of William Holmes, the fourth child of Sidney and born in 1924. When John, the eldest son went to Catworth to farm at Sidney’s sister’s farm, Islip Lodge passed to William and thence to Richard. Islip Lodge is located at NN14 3JL

Diaries and cash books were examined from 1907, but after 1908 the book became a record of cheques paid into the bank starting from 1 April 1918 up to 1927. The figures have been adjusted, as best possible, to reflect debtors and creditors in respect of one of the traders with whom Holmes bought and sold livestock. Analysis of the cash book and the various annual diaries, particularly referring to the total number of sheep dipped, made it possible to estimate how many acres were involved in the various branches of farming for most of the years, as shown in Table 4.8.²⁵¹ The table also shows the ‘adjusted turnover’, derived from detailed examination of the cash books.

Table 4.8: *Islip Lodge farming details, 1920-1926*

Period ending 25 March	Cattle estimate	Sheep dipped	Arable tons	Arable acres est.	Acreage total est.	Adjusted turnover
1920	n/k	260	75	95	?	6300
1921	100	320	80	95	310	7500
1922	100	240	45	55	245	4000
1923	50	260	75	95	230	1650
1924	30	360	55	70	230	2250
1925	30	335	50	65	215	1950
1926	30	325	??	??		1450

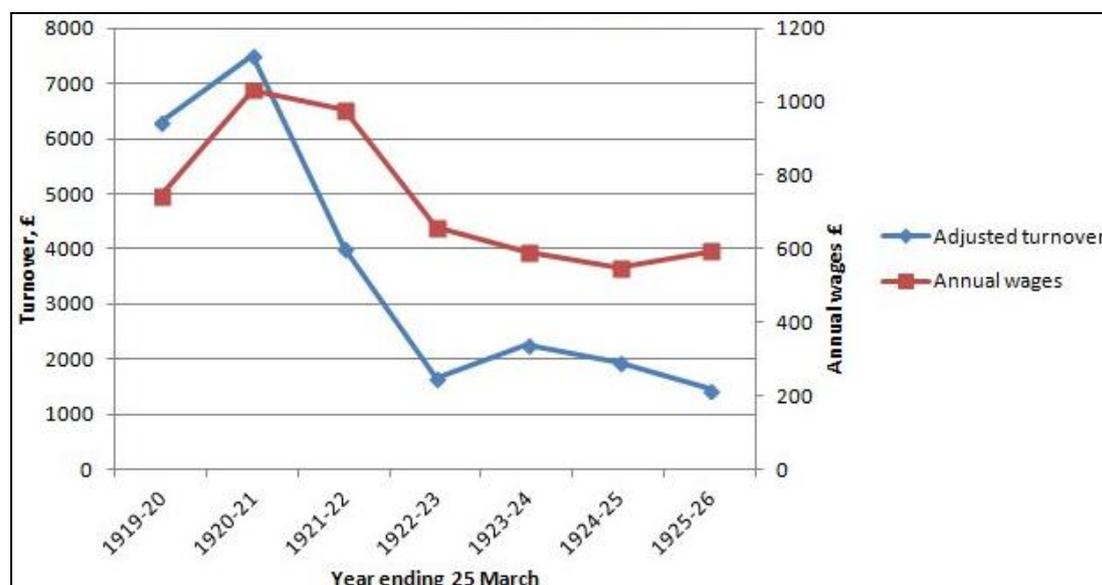
The figures for 1922-1925 seem to confirm the size of the farm at 240 acres. As was the case with Gibbard at Crouch Farm, as shown in Figure 4.23 on page 161, it appeared that Holmes’ first line of defence when deflation struck was to reduce his cattle herd, these sales probably providing much needed cash flow. Holmes’ sheep flock seemed to have been maintained or perhaps increased, and the arable acreage was probably also

²⁵¹ Middleton, *Food Production in War, passim*. Middleton reports arable yields for the years 1915-1918 with wheat ranging from 0.78-0.91 tons (about 3.75 quarters) per acre, barley 0.70-0.90 tons (about 4.0 quarters) and oats about 0.70 tons (about 4.65 quarters). The figures of arable tons and acres estimated for 1920 and 1921 are very similar to the 95 acres which prevailed at Gibbard’s Crouch Farm. An average yield of 0.80 tons per acre has been taken across Holmes’ total quarters as recorded in the cash book and diaries. One head of cattle per acre and two and a half head of sheep and lambs per acre have been used as a yardstick for livestock.

maintained with the differences in the above table reflecting yield variations. In 1919, there were the equivalent of some eight and a half workers, and this level was maintained until 1923, when it was reduced to seven and a half, later to seven. The Drayton estate records have a pencilled note of ‘Clement’ against the 1918 entry, and the 1929 entry referred first to ‘Clement’, with a later entry the same year to ‘Holmes’.²⁵²

It appeared that at the end of April 1921, the business was sufficiently cash rich for an investment of £2000 to be made into a family trust, leading to the assumption that there was no overdraft at that stage. However, by December 1924, there was an overdraft of £1678. There was a savage decline in trading after 1921-1922, as shown in Figure 4.74.

Figure 4.74: *Islip Lodge turnover and wages, 1920-1926*



The situation appeared at first sight to have been contained as is evidenced, not least, by the fact that the family still tenant this farm. The financial information stopped after 1926. There was no diary extant for 1927, but the 1928 diary indicated that there were

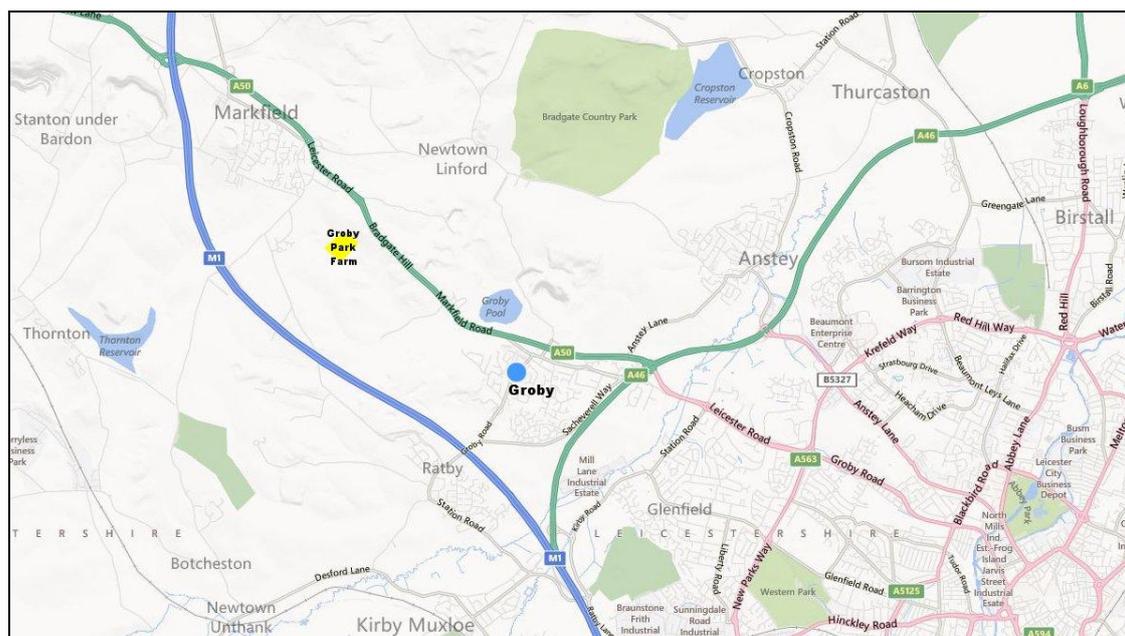
²⁵² Drayton House records. Dawn, Richard Holmes’ wife, believes that Clement may be a family relation, and it is speculated that, from some time in the mid 1920s, he may have acted as guarantor of the lease.

seven men still working on the farm. During that year, there was the first indication of an impending problem with the expressed absenteeism of one of the men, itself nothing unusual until this absenteeism gathered pace and spread to more of the men as the year unfolded, with sometimes four of the men away. All the lambs were sold in August 1928, and 16 cattle were sold in October the same year, a precursor of a major reduction in activities. The diary for 1929 had no entries until 20 March when it blandly stated 'sale at Islip Lodge'. Clearly, something very significant had happened and, following the earlier speculation, it seems possible that Clement had withdrawn his support and that Holmes had been forced into a savage retrenchment. This had, perhaps, necessitated a sale of much of the live and dead stock for, in the next week, there had been a staff of only three, the number later being reduced to two men. While there was mention of cattle, sheep were absent from the entries, so seemed to have been no longer kept, but wheat was still being grown. The diary for 1932 was missing, but manpower and wages for 1933-1939 followed the reduced pattern. The diaries painted a picture of the harsh difficulties of farming in the interwar year period, with this coming to a head for the Holmes family in 1929, when the very significant retrenchment took place. It showed that farmers, who may have survived the deflation and depression of the first half of the 1920s, may then have been affected by the depression of the second half which ran through into the mid 1930s. However, it is also a story of survival against all the odds, particularly in the first half of the 1930s, when many other tenant farmers walked away from their farms.

Groby Park Farm, Leicestershire

This holding, about 7 kilometres out of Leicester to the north-west and off the A50, as shown in Figure 4.75, was farmed by the Biggs family.

Figure 4.75: *Approximate location of Groby Park Farm*



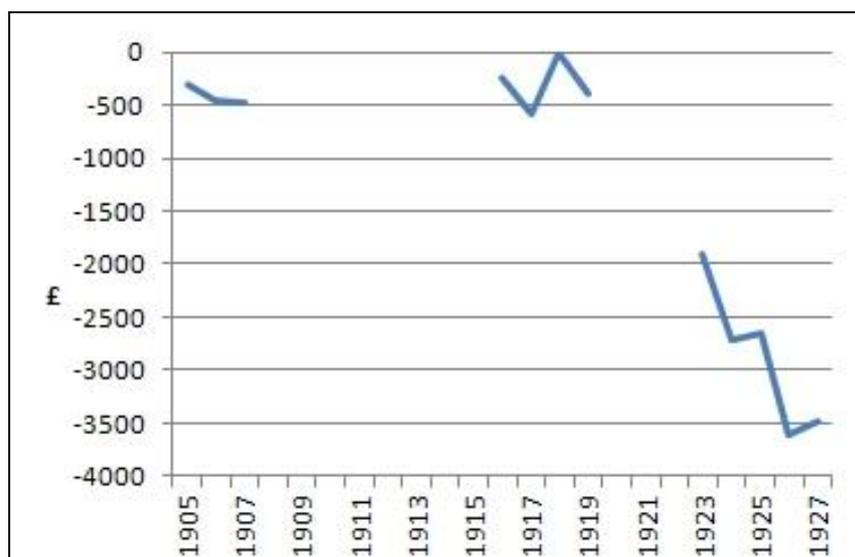
Cash books were held at Leicestershire Record Office for the period 1905-1930.²⁵³ In their master record it stated that, prior to 1928, Biggs was listed at Groby Park Farm, and thereafter at Old Hall, Groby. This was consistent with a change in the description of the cash book for the last period of the records.²⁵⁴ Some early overdraft figures were found in the first of the books, and these are included in Figure 4.76 for completeness.²⁵⁵

²⁵³ ROLLR, DE 7055/1 1905-1920, DE 7055/3 1915-1918, DE 7055/4 1918-1920, DE 7055/5 1922-1925, DE 7055/6 1925-1927, DE 7055/8 1927-1930.

²⁵⁴ ROLLR, DE 7055/8.

²⁵⁵ ROLLR, DE 7055/1.

Figure 4.76: *The increase in the overdraft at Groby Park Farm, 1918-1927*



Analysis re-started at 1916 and from 1917 an opening balance was shown, always in overdraft. An apparent profit in 1917 almost cleared this, but 1918 produced a loss. In 1919 the record was both unclear and incomplete, in 1920 the period was incomplete, and for 1921 there were no figures. By April 1923, the overdraft had reached £1909, and a year later it was £2706, and by June 1927 it was £3634.²⁵⁶ The last cash book, which started in 1927, suggested that there had been a significant change. There was now only an overdraft of around £200 which, by December 1928, had become a credit of around £100. The receipts from this last book included rents, milk sales and a milk round. The circumstantial evidence suggested that Biggs, who had more or less worked off his loans by December 1917, fared badly in the period of the next ten years. This seems to have led to him selling Groby Park Farm in the middle of 1927 and retrenching to a smaller holding of mainly dairy cows around the Old Hall at Groby, making modest gains from this.

²⁵⁶ ROLLR, DE 7055/6.

Summary of the period to 1928

Different influences characterised this period, the deflation of 1921; the surge in wages in 1924; the effect of re-joining the Gold Standard in 1925; and the subsequent downturn.

This period is summarised, therefore, by way of four sub-sections.

The period of the great deflation in 1921-1922

Looking first at this period, almost without exception all the farms studied experienced a considerable decline in cash surpluses (or true profit where stock changes were recorded). Ten farm records were found for the five-year period 1919-1923, these including five farms of the Cumber family. The results are illustrated graphically in Figure 4.77 showing the results of the five non-Cumber farms. Three of the farms (Boughton Home Farm, Elton Hall and Pitt Hall) were larger estate farms, while the other two were smaller operations. Pitt Hall ran at a loss throughout the five-year period but nevertheless, like the other four operations, sank to a low point. Crouch Farm was the only operation to remain in profit throughout for reasons already discussed.

Figure 4.77: *Profits at five farms for the period 1919-1923*

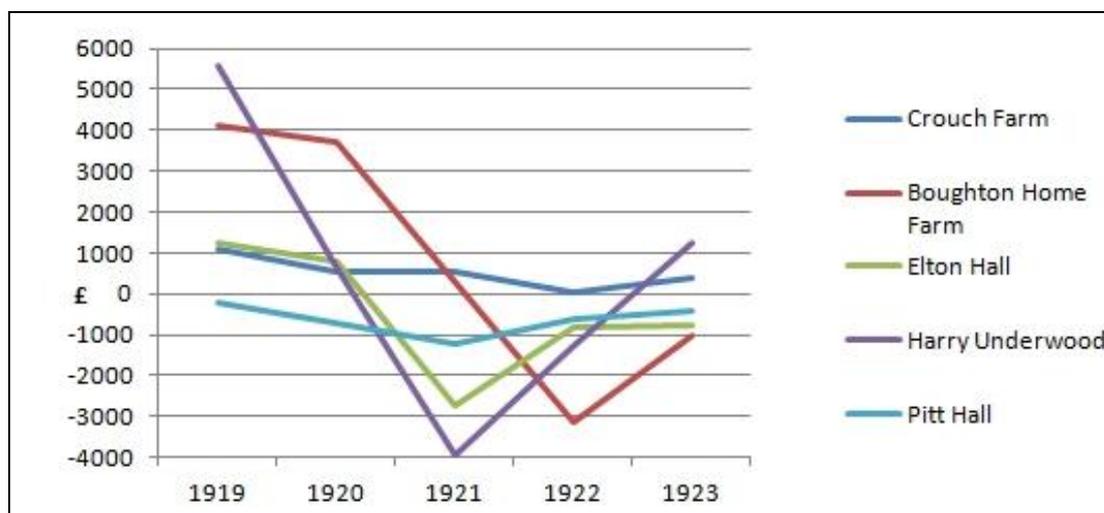
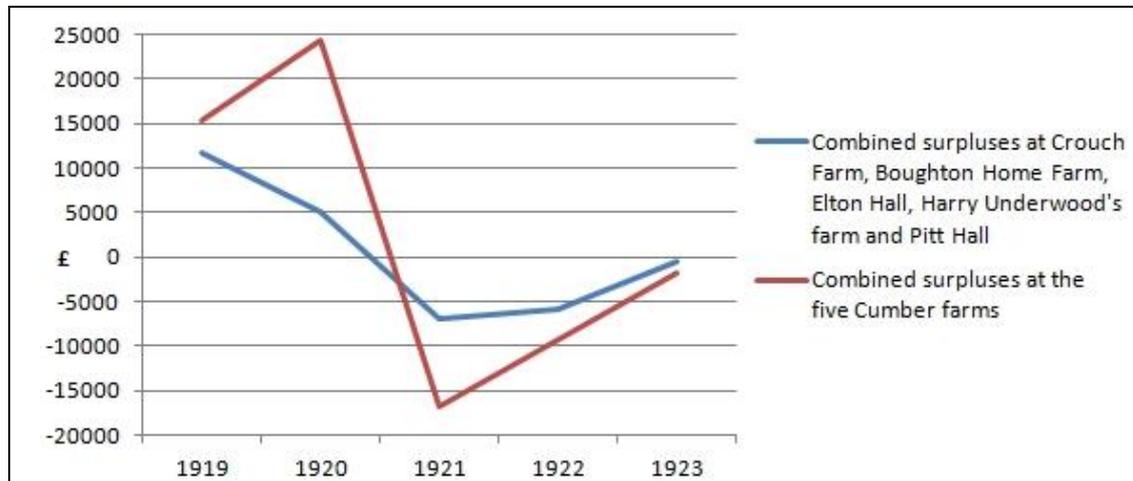


Figure 4.78 shows the surpluses totalled for these five farms with the total surpluses of the five Cumber operations, which included the profitable shire horse operation.

Figure 4.78: *Trends of surpluses for ten farms for the period 1919-1923*



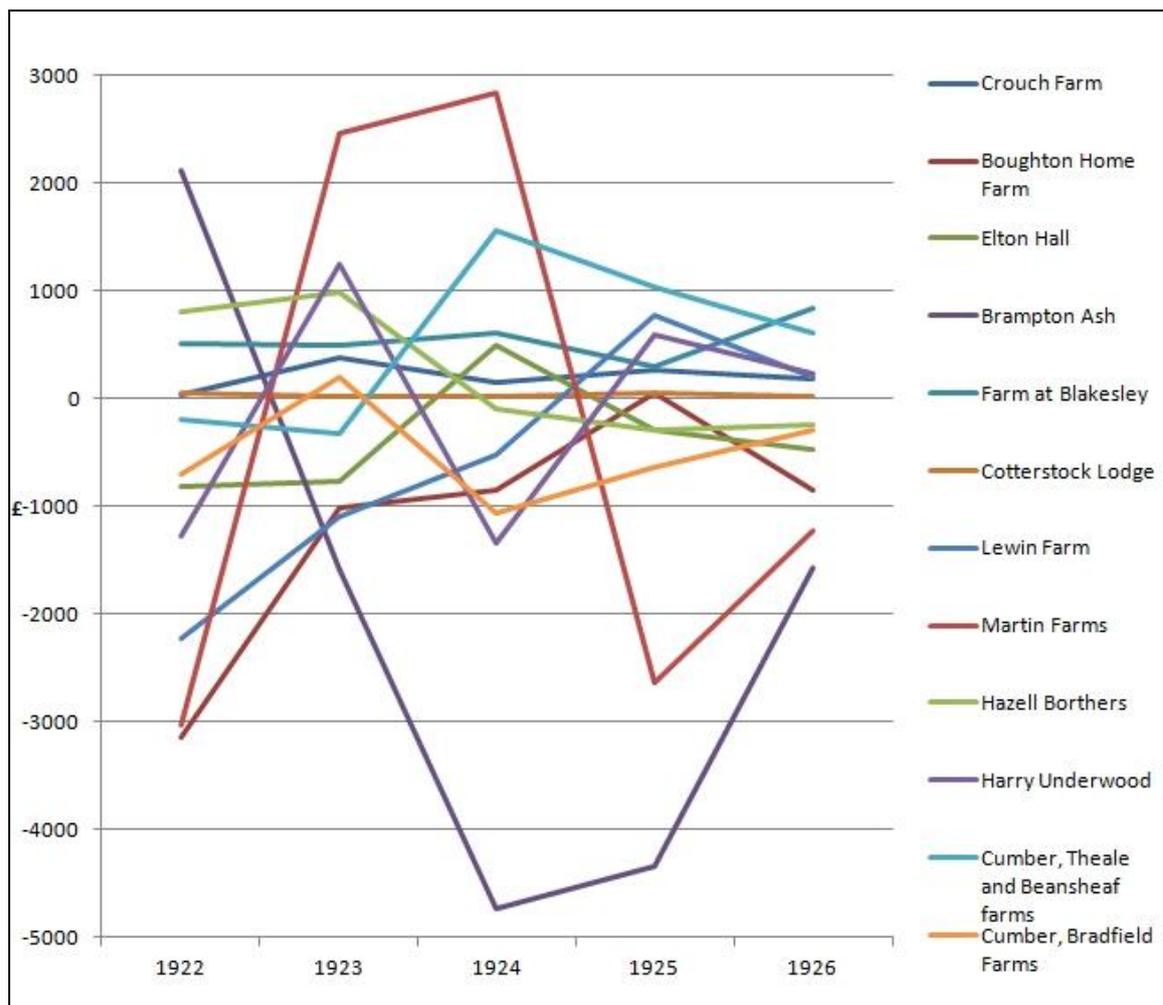
While the totalling of surpluses from different accounting methods has inherent dangers, there is no mistaking the downward trend which this shows. This is not surprising considering that prices had fallen over a very short period of not much more than a year. At Crouch Farm, Islip Lodge and Brampton Ash, there was clear evidence that the farmer sold down his stock (usually cattle) or held off buying new stock so as to ease the cash position, albeit not the true profit position. Mostly this was a short term withdrawal of one year or less, but staying out of the market longer than this, as happened at Brampton Ash, interrupted cash flow to the detriment of the business. Mixed farming now tended to be borderline profitable if the land required a higher level of manpower (Grounds Farm and Brampton Ash), or with in-hand farming in the larger estates, with Boughton House a good example of this. Where higher manpower costs appeared to have prevailed, operations became loss-making at the new deflated values, with labour costs having not fallen as much or in the same timescale. Outcomes were exacerbated where the farm was taken over at the beginning of this period, as may have been the case with Brampton Ash

which in addition was probably in a run-down condition. The combination of such circumstances was catastrophic for the farmer. Whereas, as noted by other researchers, farmers who had built up reserves during the Great War, were able to weather the storm of the great deflation in 1921-1922.

The period 1922-1925

In this next period, up to the eve of re-joining the Gold Standard, the comparison between 12 farms is shown (for one year longer to 1926) in Figure 4.79.

Figure 4.79: *Surpluses at 12 farms, 1922-1926*



Careful examination of this shows that six of the farms had an upward trend which peaked in either 1924 (Martin Farms, Elton Hall, and Cumber Theale and Beansheaf Farms) or 1925 (Boughton Home Farm which unusually broke even that year, Lewin Farm, and Harry Underwood's farm). Three farms (farm at Blakesley, Crouch Farm, and Cotterstock Lodge) moved along without a particular peak but at a small and steady surplus. Hazell Brothers and Cumber Bradfield Farms bucked the trend with falling surpluses, with no apparent reason having been found by this research. Brampton Ash (purple line with the largest loss on the graph) was in a state of decline and not typical.

Wage increases in 1924-1925 and the effects of re-joining the Gold Standard in 1925

This sub-section seeks to identify the effect of the militant-led wage increases, which started in Norfolk in 1923 and worked through to higher rates within a year, so was ahead of the wider campaign which led to the General Strike of 1926. However, it seems to have come at a time when there had been a slight improvement in farming profitability in 1923. Figure 3.13, page 70, has shown the increase in agricultural wage rates from three sources and Figure 3.2, page 62, the impact of the re-introduction of the Gold Standard in 1925, with general GDP going into decline in 1926 while agriculture was a year later in 1927. So as to try to distinguish the precise effect of these two influences, the profit turning points of those studies, where these are significant, are set out in Table 4.9.

Table 4.9: *Key profit changes in the mid 1920s*

Farm	Comment	Improvement in Profits	Wage rates increased	Dip in profits
Crouch Farm		1923, 1925, 1929	1924-1925	1924 and 1927+
Boughton Home Farm	Large estate	1925 and 1929	1926	1926 on
Friars Court		1925 and 1928		1926 and 1927
Harry Underwood Long Buckby	Cattle fattening	1923 and 1925-1927		1924 and 1928
Martin Family		1923 and 1924 and 1928-1929		1925-1927
Anon in Long Buckby	Cattle fattening	1928		1925-1927
Cumber, Theale and Beansheaf	Mainly livestock	1924 and 1929		1926-1927
Lewin Farm	See below	1924 and 1928		1925 and 1926
Pitt Hall Farm	Large estate	1925 and 1928		1926 and 1927
Brampton Ash				1925 on
Farm in Blakesley		1922-1924 and 1926		1925 and 1927
Elton Hall	Large estate	1924	No evidence	1925 on
Elmfield Farm		1924, 1926, 1928		1925 and 1927
Lamb at Sibford Ferris		1924		1925 on

The Table demonstrates clearly that there was an upturn before the agricultural wage hike in or after 1924, and that this upturn was choked off by this wage increase. This improvement in profits was reflected in the comments made by the Agricultural Tribunal of 1922 in its second interim and final reports made in mid 1923 and May 1924 respectively. Limited recovery became evident between the setting up of the tribunal, its first interim report in early 1923, and its later reports. The Table also shows that most of the farms which were studied experienced a fall in profits in 1925, with a few bucking this trend and showing the decline a year later. Thus it appears to be the case that the decline in profits for most, but not all, resulted from the wage increase.

The period towards 1928

The fall-out from re-joining the Gold Standard, together with the effect of the wage increases, was further complicated for livestock farmers by the adverse impact from 1926 of the dominance by the American Meat Trusts of the markets for these products. So with relatively lower manning levels than the mixed farms, they had suffered less from the impact of wage increases, as shown in Table 4.9. Competition from abroad appears to have signalled a considerable downturn in the fortunes of graziers, with Harry Underwood having bucked this trend until 1928, at which time some of the mixed farmers were seeing better conditions. The two Long Buckby cattle-fattening operations are compared in Figure 4.80, which suggests that it was possible to fend off the competition from abroad until 1927-1928.

Figure 4.80: *Profit comparisons of two cattle operations in Long Buckby, 1922-1929*

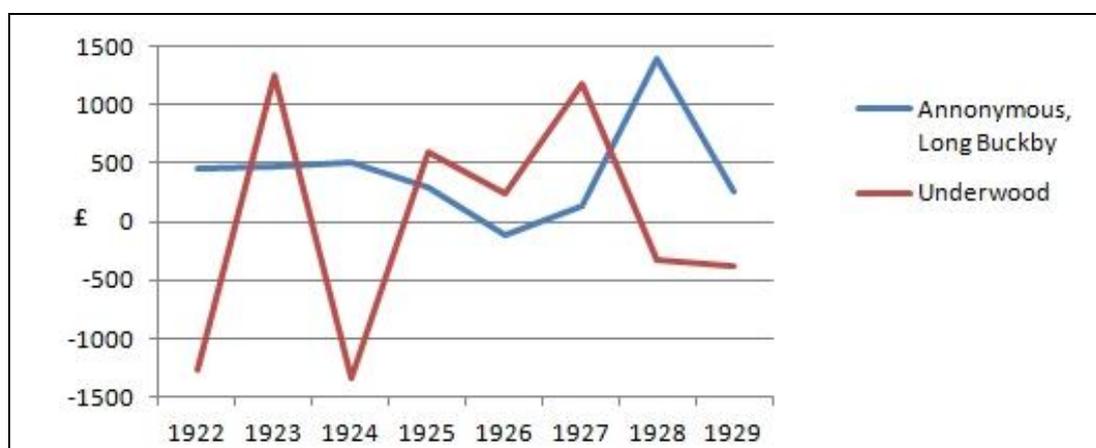
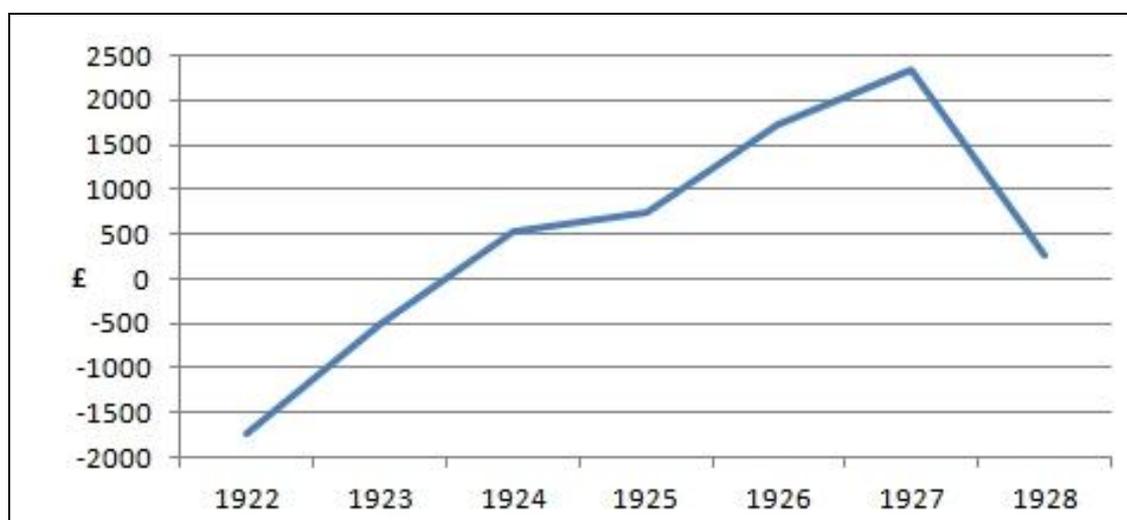


Table 4.9, on the previous page, also shows that the later improvement in profits was far more patchy with those experiencing it feeling this benefit in 1928 or 1929. Not shown in the Table are Cotterstock Lodge which had no discernible trend over the period; and Hazell Brothers which instead had a peak in 1927 but nevertheless showed an up-trend between 1928 and 1929. Also not shown is Brampton Ash with a surge in profits in 1929 being due to the impending sale of the business. This research agrees with Feinstein's

work, Figure 3.2 on page 62, that the nadir of farming fortunes was in 1927. This is further supported by the evidence from some of the Elton Hall tenants who, as a consequence, either sought rent reductions in 1928 or, in a few cases, moved out of farming altogether. The Cambridge University study, shown earlier in Figure 4.15 on page 152, suggested that it was a little earlier in 1926, probably due to a higher element of relatively unprofitable arable, perhaps coupled with the impact of higher wages.

The Cumber family Theale and Beansheaf farms are included in Table 4.9, page 222, but not the Bradfield farm which shows no discernible trend nor the family's Manor Farm at Yatesbury, which ran the shire horse stud operation alongside other farming. This is shown in Figure 4.81 to demonstrate a completely different trend as a consequence of the stud operation. The downturn here in 1928 results from lower and unexplained stud sales.

Figure 4.81: *Profit at Manor Farm, Yatesbury, 1922-1928*



Retrospective reviews from other sources

The 1931 League of Nations report was referred to in Chapter 3, pages 87-89. This shows the relative decline in crop prices compared with livestock, and that the level of wages

outran the price of agricultural products. Brassley has underscored the changes between 1919 and 1929, noting that wheat fell from 17/0d to 9/10d per hundredweight; barley from 21/2d to 9/11d; fat cattle prices and sheep nearly halved; and fat pig prices more than halved.²⁵⁷ A much more hard-hitting reflection on agriculture came from Lord Bledisloe's forward to the text of three lectures given by Turnor, an ardent campaigner for agricultural reform, whose views were not supported by fellow agriculturalists.²⁵⁸ Bledisloe referred to 'the pathetic plight of British agriculture', and considered that 'the canker of individualism' among farmers should be swept away, and that owner occupation of farms was the only way forward.

Another retrospective review, albeit from a different angle, was provided by the Agricultural Economics Research Institute of the University of Oxford.²⁵⁹ In December 1928, under the authorship of Skilbeck and Messer, the Institute launched a very comprehensive nationwide survey of 1469 estate holdings tenanted 340,526 farms, and reported on the incidence of notices to quit and demands for reductions of rent.²⁶⁰ Taken by farm size, the conclusions are interesting, as shown in Table 4.10, and these are mirrored by the circumstances found at Elton Hall that there were ample tenants waiting to replace those who wanted to give up. So it could not be concluded that overall agriculture was in a state of depression.

²⁵⁷ Brassley, 'British farming between the wars', p. 189.

²⁵⁸ C. Turnor, *The Land: Agriculture and National Economy* (London, 1929), p. viii. <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/36592> [accessed 15 January 2013].

²⁵⁹ <http://www.oua.ox.ac.uk/holdings/Agricultural%20Economics%20AE.pdf> [accessed 14 April 2013]. The Institute, whose name had four variants, was formed in 1913 with C. S. Orwin its director until 1945. Its early reports during the Great War related to farming in Oxfordshire and Berkshire; it produced a number of agricultural atlases; a report on grass farming in the Welland Valley in 1928; and the publication next cited.

²⁶⁰ D. Skilbeck *et al*, *The Incidence of Farming Prosperity and Depression. A Survey of Conditions in England To-day* (Oxford, 1929), *passim* and table adapted from p. 10.

Table 4.10: *Number of farms in 1928 Cambridge University survey, and percentage seeking rent reduction or serving notices to quit*

Farm acreage range	No. of farms in survey	Percentages seeking reductions or serving notices to quit
0-50	218,468	0.05
50-100	50,147	0.4
100-150	27,388	0.8
150-300	32,299	1.6
300+	12,224	3.0

The second part of the Skilbeck report commented on counties individually, and it is relevant to quote a number of its conclusions. From Buckinghamshire ‘The grass land dairying of the Aylesbury vale is sound. There are practically no farms in the market, and inquiries for farms show an appreciable increase’. From Leicestershire ‘The county is not in a bad way. There have been remarkably few reductions...the 300-acre farm is the worst hit...things have been very bad, but are improving’. From Northamptonshire ‘The county was much worse hit in 1927 than in 1928, and there has been less unrest in the past year’. From Oxfordshire ‘In the south of the county farmers are not doing badly...There have been many notices and bankruptcies on the heavy Oxford clays.’ From Warwickshire ‘There is a certain amount of dissatisfaction on the heavy-land grazing farms...and many reductions have been given...and there does not seem to be any real difficulty in finding suitable tenants...The smaller farms are in a better position’. This report paints a generally optimistic outlook, but three years later in 1932, Messer published what was effectively an update, which is considered in Chapter 5, page 255.²⁶¹

²⁶¹ M. Messer, *The Agricultural Depression of 1931: Its Nature and Incidence* (Oxford, 1932), *passim*.

A. G. Street, in his author's note to *Country Calendar*, wrote of living far beyond his income after 1922 and, by 1927, being close to bankruptcy.²⁶² This pushed him into writing in 1929, leaving a legacy of almost unparalleled written word of his farming experiences in the 1920s and 1930s. In his fictional *The Gentleman of the Party*, Street clearly reflected his personal position with a forecast that 1927 would be another year, like 1879, which would 'put the tin hat on a hell of a lot of farmers...'²⁶³ This prophesy was soon to be fulfilled, with the old guard pointing the finger at the new breed of farmers who had started just after the war when money was easy. His research certainly showed these to be more vulnerable to the downturn, but so were established farmers who had not wisely invested the gains of the good times from 1916-1920. As financial conditions worsened after 1925, some farmers did not at first face reality, presumably hoping that the situation was a temporary one. When it was apparent that this was not the case, an urgent need for cash started to become apparent. This could not be achieved by simply laying off one or two hands, leading to irrational decisions. However, one man's meat is another's poison, and the cattle dealers benefited from the farmers' misfortunes, even prompting some farmers to go in for dealing, often with far from satisfactory results as they were unable to match the scale of the dealers' operations.²⁶⁴ Farmers were not only reducing their livestock, they were over-cropping with corn, selling their hay, and increasingly relying on the new hire-purchase system. So Street's probably not-so-mythical farmer was forced to sell his 600-acre farm, bought for £20 per acre, for £15 per

²⁶² A. Street, *Country Calendar*, pp. xvii-xix.

²⁶³ Street, *The Gentleman of the Party*, pp. 197-198.

²⁶⁴ Pers. comm. Robin May, Barnstaple, (24 May 2014). The records of the May family, cattle dealers over several generations, were inspected and showed a turnover, in today's terms, of some £20m trading some 15,000 animals from probably around 500 transactions and with a gross margin of 6-7 percent and a net margin of 1 percent. The complexity of trading cattle and sheep over a wide geographical area, covering a significant amount of southern England up to the Midlands, would not be something that a small farmer would be able to replicate.

acre.²⁶⁵ On the other hand, Kitchen's autobiography *Brother to the Ox*, which covers *inter alia* his farming employment for the period from 1927 to the early 1930s, does not suggest any hardship on the farm where he worked as a cowman. However, it was a dairy farm in the Sheffield area, and had established its own milk round, so perhaps the answer lay in that formula, although this has not been found in any of the studies of this research.²⁶⁶

Trollope's words remained true that 'Land gives so much more than the rent. It gives position and influence and political power, to say nothing of the game.'²⁶⁷ So Street's mythical farm was sold to the son of an Earl, looking to settle in society and go into Parliament.²⁶⁸ There remained sufficient buyers from industrialists and businessmen who had made good – indeed the author's grandfather bought a 600-acre farm in Sussex in 1934.²⁶⁹

²⁶⁵ Street, *The Gentleman of the Party*, pp. 206-208. The farm is located at Sutton Mandeville, near Salisbury, according to cottage letting details at http://www.theholidaycottages.co.uk/showDetails.php?cottage_id=540 [accessed 18 January 2013].

²⁶⁶ F. Kitchen, *Brother to the Ox: An Autobiography of a Farm Labourer* (1940, Horsham, 1981), pp. 217-231.

²⁶⁷ Anthony Trollope's Archdeacon Grantly in *The Last Chronicle of Barset*.

²⁶⁸ Street, *The Gentleman of the Party*, pp. 207-208.

²⁶⁹ Wephurst Park, near Petworth. This change of ownership towards the *nouveaux riches* had its effect on hunting, the traditional sport of many farmers and the squirearchy up to the start of the Great War. Farmers, particularly in the Shires where hunting was at a cost premium, could neither afford the time nor the money to continue hunting when farming declined early in the 1920s, and the squire class went into decline for the same reason. However, while hunting flourished even into the 1930s, it had a very different social structure and had moved away from its traditional base. When this happened, farmers, who were on the outside of hunting as a result, either tried to stop hunts crossing their land or tried to charge them to cross it, while some turned to handing over shooting rights over their land – see R. Carr, *English Fox Hunting* (London, 1976), pp. 230-8. H. Longrigg, *The History of Fox Hunting* (London, 1976), pp. 199-200.

Conclusion

In Chapter 3, Figure 3.2, page 62, it was shown that agricultural GDP followed the same trends as general GDP, albeit usually one year later, and that agricultural prices followed the general trends, Figure 3.5 page 65. However, after being a very badly paid sector, the gap between agricultural and general wages was closed to some degree, Figure 3.11, page 69, albeit by the end of the 1930s, there was still a significant gap, as referred to on page 70. The number employed in agriculture fell in absolute terms, Figure 3.14 page 71, with migration to the towns.

The combination of higher wages, re-joining the Gold Standard and competition from the American Meat Trusts showed that, in the majority of the farms studied, profits were adversely affected after 1924, as shown in Table 4.9 on page 222, albeit in differing ways depending on the farming mix. In the previous section of this chapter, pages 225-228, this trend was shown to have endorsed by A. G. Street, whilst the 1931 League of Nations report and work by Skilbeck and Messer had noted worsening conditions at the end of the 1920s without identifying the turning point as being 1925.

Government followed laissez-faire policies throughout the period to 1928, giving no incentives or encouragement to farming. Despite this and with the exception of the graziers, profits were on the up as the end of the decade neared and before the repercussions of the Wall Street Crash which presaged the even tougher 1930s. For the estate owner, the age of 'plenty' in the second half of the Great War and up to 1920 had come to an end, resulting in increased subsidies for their farming operations. The move away from arable to pasture, which had started in the late 1870s resumed after the brief change in direction from the ploughing-up campaign at the end of the Great War.

Chapter 5

Crisis: Government intervention and limited recovery: 1929-

1939 with case-studies

In the last chapter, the period 1919-1928 was examined in detail and, in this one, the second part of the interwar period 1929-1939 is considered. The world fall-out from the Wall Street Crash of 1929 resulted in the Great Depression, which influenced much of the 1930s. As a result, it is not necessary to split the economic and political considerations as was done in Chapter 4, and these are considered first for the whole period, followed by an overview of farming trends. Then, more detailed consideration is given to farming matters, this being split into two periods. The first of these runs up to 1935 and the second after 1935, by which time the effect of subsidies had started to achieve slightly better times for the farming community. Finally, the individual farm studies are set out and analysed.

Political and economic background

After four and a half years in power, and perceived in some quarters as ‘old and exhausted’, the Conservative party suffered a narrow defeat in 1929, referred to earlier on page 97.¹ Economic activity had remained at a low level for many years, with unemployment steady at around seven percent of the workforce. So when a budget deficit of £120m was forecast in July 1931, this led to the withdrawal of funds from the UK, and the depreciation of Government Securities. At the request of the King, a non-party caretaker government, with an emergency cabinet of only ten, under Labour’s Ramsay

¹ The quote is from P. Doerr, *British Foreign Policy 1919-1939* (Manchester, 1998), pp.104-5.

MacDonald was formed in August 1931 with the expectation that it would serve for the duration of the crisis, expected to be some five or six weeks.² MacDonald was expelled from the Labour party as a consequence, and many Labour and some Liberal members refused to follow their leaders into this arrangement.³ It was assumed that a national government would meet with immediate international approval and that confidence would be restored and the pound saved. But this did not happen and sterling came under attack. Loans from Paris and New York had to be rapidly put together, and a new budget with swingeing cuts presented in September, but the final run on sterling began immediately thereafter, resulting in Britain leaving the Gold Standard on 21 September 1931.⁴ The pound immediately fell and, by 1932, an effective devaluation of 28 percent had occurred. With the economy in tatters and shame in the air at leaving the Gold Standard, dissolution was not far away and was announced on 6 October 1931.⁵ As can be seen from Table 5.1, Great Britain was less scarred than other major economies by the immediate aftermath of the ‘Crash’.⁶

² G. Fry, *The Politics of Crisis: An Interpretation of British Politics, 1931-1945* (Basingstoke, 2001), pp. 4-5. N. Smart, *The National Government, 1931-40* (Basingstoke, 1999), pp. 9-11.

³ Graves, *The Long Week-End*, p. 255.

⁴ Dewey, *War and Progress*, pp. 212-220. B.P.P., HC, 21 September 1931, CCLVI, 1289-1409. Government had been forced into the practical decision over the weekend and on the Monday thereafter took a Bill through its first and second readings to confirm this action, but not without considerable procedural and other procrastination.

⁵ B.P.P., HC, 6 October 1931, CCLVII, 980-982.

⁶ J. Blum, *The European World: A History* (1966, Boston, 1970), p. 885.

Table 5.1: *Change in economic indicators, 1929–1932*

	United States	Great Britain	France	Germany
Industrial production	–46%	–23%	–24%	–41%
Wholesale prices	–32%	–33%	–34%	–29%
Foreign trade	–70%	–60%	–54%	–61%
Unemployment	+607%	+129%	+214%	+232%

It had been assumed that the national government would be a short-term arrangement with a general election soon to follow along party lines. However, it became a contest of the Coalition versus the Labour Party, with the election of October 1931 seeing 554 seats returned in favour of the continuation of national government, dominated by the Conservatives with 470 seats and still led by Ramsay MacDonald.⁷ Soon after coming to power in October 1931, tariffs were under discussion. The first enabling Bill had been considered at the end of 1931, but by February 1932, a general 10 percent import tariff was in place.⁸ The problem with tariffs, introduced to try and strengthen the trade balance, was that once extended across large parts of the world, it just created a vicious circle of contracting trade relationships, which only fed the depression.⁹

Compared with a basket of currencies of Britain’s main trading partners, a weak pound persisted throughout the 1930s, giving British exports a competitive edge, and helping the domestic economy to recover, as shown in Figure 3.1 on page 62. Leaving the Gold

⁷ Fry, *The Politics of Crisis*, pp. 10-12. Smart, *The National Government*, pp. 12-13.

⁸ These were under more or less continuous discussion from early November 1931, see B.P.P., HC, 10 November 1931, CCLIX, 48. The House was divided on whether tariffs were a good idea with some ministers declaring that they would be ‘disastrous to the trade and industry of the country’. This led to a motion of censure put down by Rt. Hon. George Lansbury, who later led the Labour Party see B.P.P., HC, 2 February 1932, CCLXI, 33. However, when it came to the Second Reading, there was a large majority in favour of tariffs, see B.P.P., HC, 15 February 1932, CCLXI, 1295-1430 and 16 February 1932, CCLXI, 1481-1607.

⁹ Graves, *The Long Week-End*, pp. 261, 305-6. Mowat, *Britain between the Wars*, p. 415. Dewey, *War and Progress*, p. 222.

Standard also enabled Britain to pursue a policy of low interest rates, with these falling to three percent by April 1932, and then from June 1932 to December 1939 to two percent. Recovery was also helped by a rise in real incomes for those in work.¹⁰ In national policy terms, it was now a case of letting the low interest rate environment gradually heal the economy, although this was helped by a surge in house-building, particularly in Greater London, and the development of the motor car and other light industry in the Midlands. However, the human cost was the surge in unemployment, shown in Figure 3.15 on page 71, due to the decrease in American orders and the general disorganisation of world markets.¹¹ With the unemployment rate remaining stubbornly above that of the 1920s until 1937, the period 1933-1937 can hardly be described as a boom.

Stanley Baldwin became Prime Minister for the third time in June 1935, and in the general election of November 1935 he led the National Government to a comfortable majority, with 429 seats to 154 for the Labour Party and 21 for the independent Liberals. Considering that the election followed ‘the greatest depression in British history’, it was a quiet affair, perhaps because people were resigned to sitting-out the recovery, with *The Times* declaring it ‘a triumph of steadiness’.¹² The progress of the downturn and recovery is shown by sector in Figure 5.1.¹³

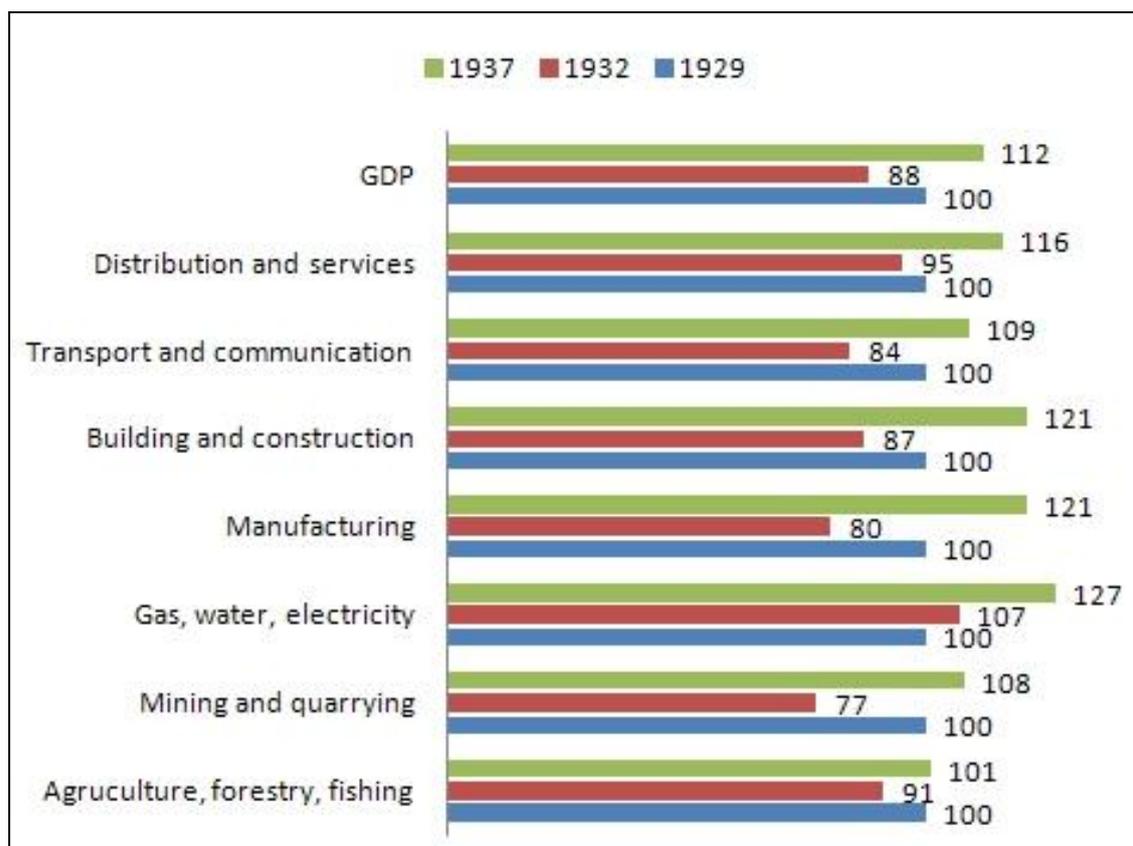
¹⁰ Dewey, *War and Progress*, pp. 212-220, 238-244. Dewey finds the explanations of the economic recovery of the 1930s ‘hard to disentangle’. It is not the purpose of this thesis to go into depth on this issue.

¹¹ Graves, *The Long Week-End*, p. 248. Dewey, *War and Progress*, p. 227.

¹² J. Stevenson *et al*, *Britain in the Depression: Society & Politics, 1929-1939* (1977, Harlow, 1994), pp. 272-275.

¹³ Dewey, *War and Progress*, pp. 227 and 232.

Figure 5.1: Sectoral income components of GDP, 1929, 1932 and 1937



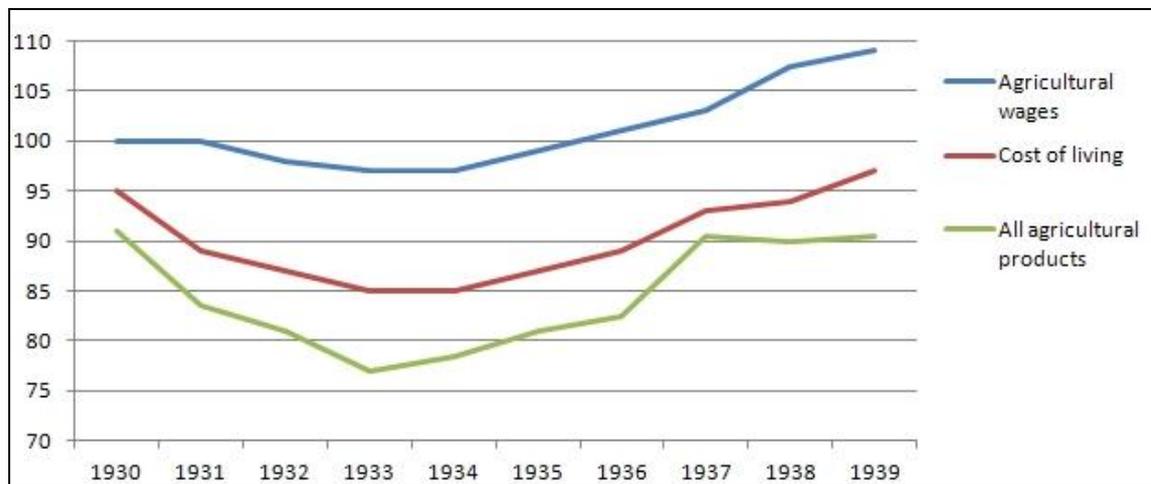
Stanley Baldwin retired as Prime Minister in 1937, and Neville Chamberlain took his place. Soon after, the threat of war assumed the political agenda with ministers starting to plan what they would do to feed the nation in this eventuality. Financial salvation finally came to farmers, as it had done in the Great War, through the conflict that was about to unfold.

Farming trends for the period from 1929

Figure 5.1 shows that agriculture had a relatively shallow depression from 1929-1932 but also that, by 1937, it had recovered less than any of the other sectors, under-performing the cost of living after 1927 and up to 1939, as shown in Figure 5.2.¹⁴

¹⁴ Graph prepared by the author from a variety of sources. The index of all agricultural products is taken from MAF, *Agricultural Statistics (1939)*. Vol. 74, Part 1, p. 95, and is based on 1927-

Figure 5.2: *Indices (1927-1929=100) of agricultural wages, cost of living and all agricultural products (inclusive of subsidies), 1930-1939*

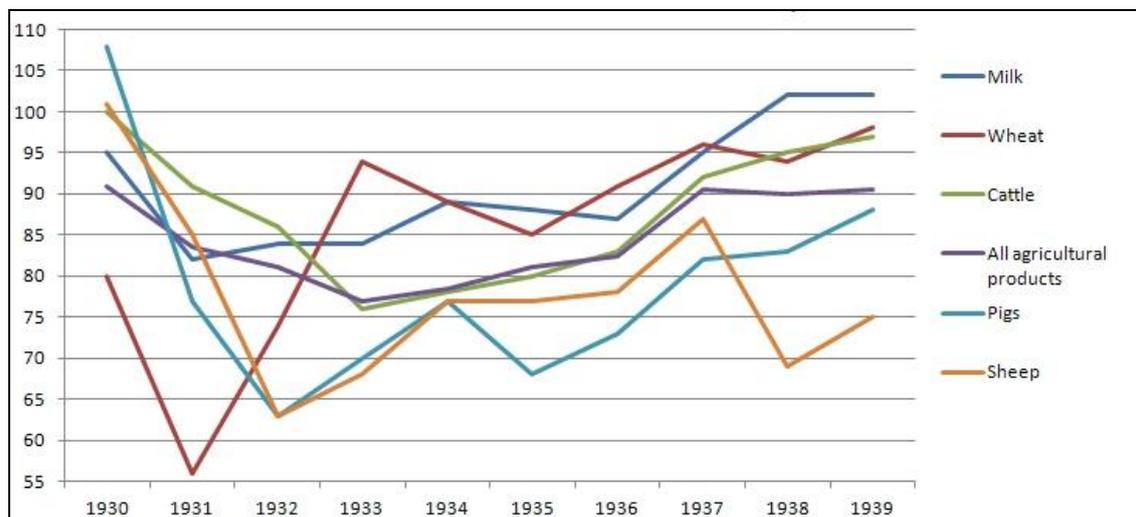


It also shows that agricultural wages out-performed the cost of living, albeit actual wages paid from 1934 were almost certainly higher. It supports all the arguments made by agriculturalists and the Farmers' Union that agriculture was in a bad way. Figure 5.3 very clearly demonstrates the winners and losers in agriculture in this period, and shows the unfairness of the whole approach of subsidies, with pigs and sheep both having fallen very significantly by 1932, but with no subsidy to rescue them.¹⁵

29=100, and includes commodity subsidies; the cost of living and minimum wage indices from MAFF, *A Century of Agricultural Statistics*, p. 65, both rebased to 1927-29=100. Other sources suggest that the actual wages paid are higher from 1934 onwards, these sources are Ernle, *English Farming*, p. 527; wage information from Crouch Farm; and from Bellerby, 'Distribution of farm income', p. 264.

¹⁵ Graph prepared by author from MAF, *Agricultural Statistics (1939). Vol. 74, Part 1*, p. 95. This index is based on 1927-29=100; the indices used are after taking account of subsidies for wheat, fat cattle and milk; the sheep index is an average of sheep, ewes and lambs; the pigs index an average of baconers, porkers and sows.

Figure 5.3: *Indices (1927-1929=100) of all agricultural products, and its main components, 1930-1939*



The Figure shows how wheat was ‘saved’ by its subsidy from 1933 onwards. It also shows that up until 1932, cattle outperformed all the other agricultural indices, but then moved in line with this from 1933 onwards, with the subsidy introduced from 1934 just keeping it level-pegging with the overall index, before it out-stripped this in 1938 and 1939. The gripe from the livestock farmers always seemed to be directed towards the cattle element of farming whereas Figure 5.3 shows that sheep and pigs were the worst performers. In 1930, both had outperformed the base index of 1927-1929, but thereafter little attention seems to have been paid to their plight. As is shown later on pages 242-243, the sheep market had been hit by a huge increase in imports from the Empire.

While the wages index, in Figure 5.2, shows that these costs were still ahead of prices compared with the baseline of 1927-1929, from 1935 onwards prices increased much faster than wages with the exception of sheep, which had seemingly dragged the all agricultural products index down. This was also despite a pause in the relentless move from arable to grass as was shown in Chapter 3, and an improvement in the price of

wheat as is shown in Figure 5.4 below.¹⁶ The Cambridge study of 1935, see pages 252-253, showed that overall farm income was broadly the same as in 1933, with gross income up by 14 percent, while costs had risen by 17.5 percent.

Figures 5.2 and 5.3 are a good basis on which to reflect the government's successes or otherwise in the period, particularly during the four-year period 1932-1936 when Walter Elliot was Minister of Agriculture. *Country Life* doubted that the Cabinet shared Elliot's enthusiasm towards agriculture, probably leading later to his transfer to the Scottish Office.¹⁷ *Country Life*'s leader writer doubted whether the new Minister, William Morrison, would get a better hearing and also whether the government would shape up to the task for a potentially vast expansion of arable cultivation in the event of war. This was the second reference, in these columns, to the prospect of war, the earlier one reporting on the presidential address by Major Dorman-Smith to the National Farmers' Union, in which he had lamented that government had not thought fit to consult farmers about defence plans.¹⁸ Dorman-Smith had commented brutally that plans for another conflict, which were 'pigeon-holed in a Whitehall office, were about as much use in a modern war as Daniel's catapult'.

The foregoing is key to the understanding of agriculture in the 1930s, with little recovery or hope until towards the end of this period. By the late 1920s, the much increased world production of agricultural products, particularly of cereals, had ushered in a glut. The

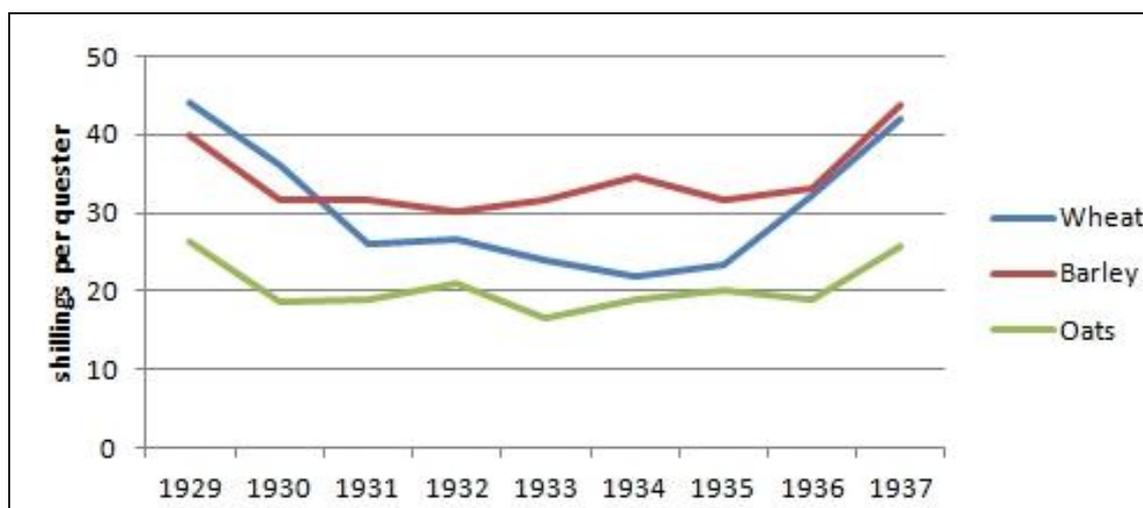
¹⁶ DOA University of Cambridge, *Changes in the Economic Organisation of Agriculture: A Comparative study of Conditions in the Eastern Counties of England in 1933 and 1935 (Report No. 23)* (Cambridge, 1936).

¹⁷ *CL*, 81, 2091 (13 February 1937), p. 162.

¹⁸ *CL*, 81, 2089 (30 January 1937), p. 110.

price of wheat had fallen by 50 percent between 1929 and 1931, barley by even more, and beef by about 30 percent.¹⁹ Although agricultural prices held up better than all-wholesale prices, this product price advantage did not outweigh the lack of growth in the agricultural sector prices until 1936 or 1937, with corn prices shown in Figure 5.4.²⁰

Figure 5.4: Annual average prices of wheat, barley and oats, 1929-1937



Of particular note from this graph is the very sharp fall in the price of wheat in 1931, which particularly affected grain farmers in the east, and which was not stabilised until the Wheat Act 1932 took effect that year. Nature had played its part in 1931 with a very wet summer and a ‘disastrous’ harvest, and this added to farmers’ woes with buyers holding off as prices fell and more farmers, often forced by their creditors to sell at any price, were forced out of business.²¹ The number of bankruptcies peaked at 600 in 1932, against a median figure of around 400 throughout the 1920s, as shown graphically in

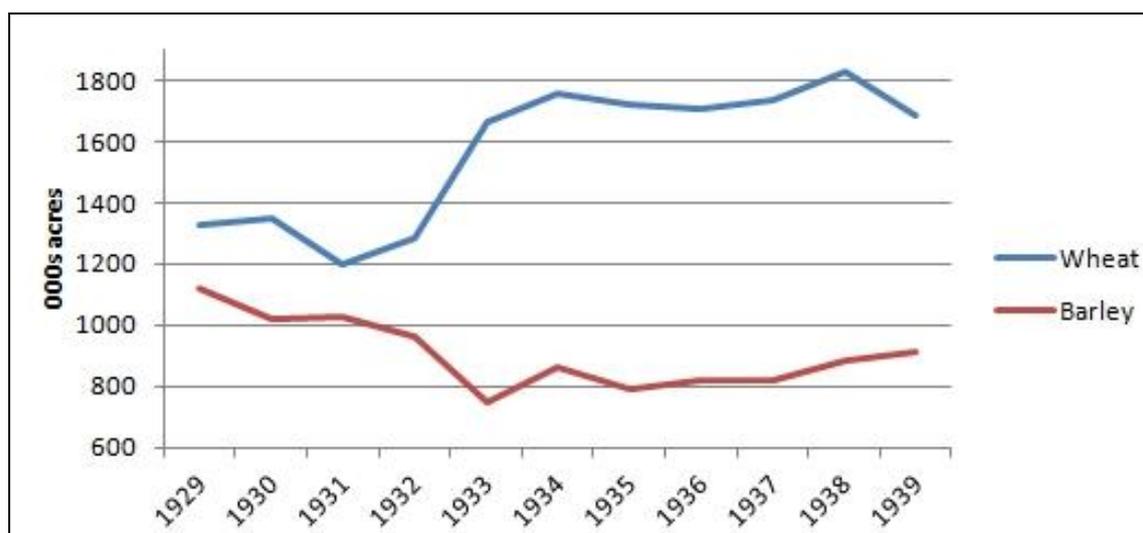
¹⁹ Brown, *Agriculture in England. A Survey of Farming*, p. 107. Howkins, *Death of Rural England*, pp. 52-54. Hammond, ‘British food supplies’, p. 3.

²⁰ Graph prepared by author from the individual annual statistics for the period of the graph from MAF, *Agricultural Statistics: Report on the Agricultural Returns*. The cattle figures relate to second quality shorthorns, and the sheep to ‘downs’ sheep.

²¹ Whetham, *Agrarian History, Volume 8*, pp. 233-4, 238. The Meteorological Office, ‘Oxford data’.

Figure 3.36 on page 87. The passing of the Wheat Act of 1932 encouraged farmers back into this crop with a significant increase in wheat production after 1932, part of which was at the expense of barley, as shown in Figure 5.5.

Figure 5.5: Trends of wheat and barley acreage, England and Wales, 1929-1939²²



Cattle prices underwent a steady fall from 1929-1935, but there was a very severe drop in sheep prices from 1930 to 1932, with then a partial recovery, as shown in Figure 5.6.²³

²² Graph prepared by author from MAFF, *A Century of Agricultural Statistics*, pp. 94-102.

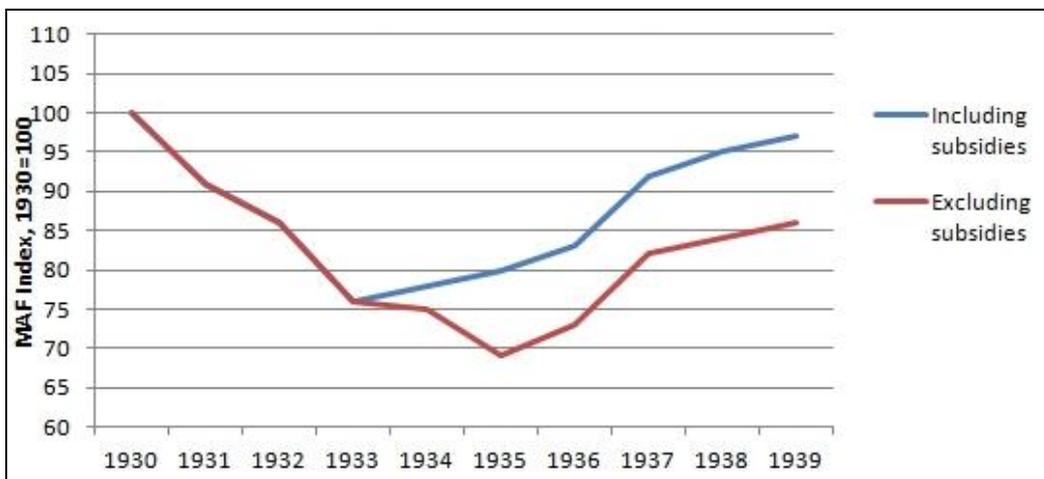
²³ Graph prepared by author from the individual annual statistics for the period of the graph from MAF, *Agricultural Statistics: Report on the Agricultural Returns*. The cattle figures relate to second quality shorthorns, and the sheep to 'downs' sheep.

Figure 5.6: Annual average price of cattle and sheep, 1929-1937



The MAF cattle price index from 1930-1939 showed that the cattle price without subsidies increased after 1935, as shown in Figure 5.7, despite there being no evidence of a significant increase in meat consumption in the 1930s and beef consumption appearing to have been giving way to an increase in lamb and mutton.²⁴

Figure 5.7: Cattle price index, 1930-1939



²⁴ Information from a late 1930s survey of urban areas only from C. Spencer, *British Food: An Extraordinary Thousand Years of History*, (2002, London, 2004), pp. 306-7. J. Oddy, *From Plain Fare to Fusion Food: British Diet from the 1890s to the 1990s* (Woodbridge, 2003), p. 114. Graph prepared by author from MAF, *Agricultural Statistics (1939), Vol. 74, Part 1, Acreage and Production of Crops, Number of Livestock and of Agricultural Workers, and Output and Prices of Agricultural Produce in England and Wales* (HMSO), p. 95.

After the fall in the price of milk after the Great War this had stayed relatively stable until 1930, as shown in Figure 3.30 on page 83. However, there was a big drop in the price in 1931 and 1932, shown in Figure 5.8.

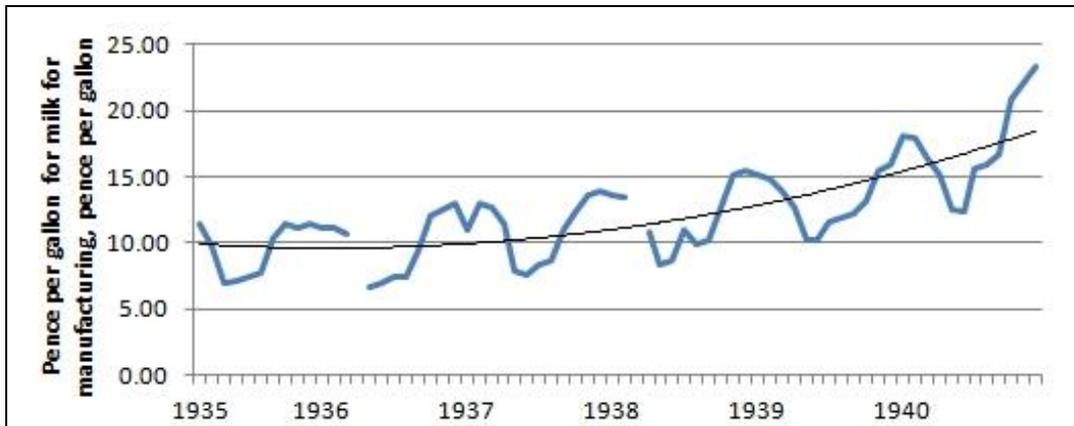
Figure 5.8: *Milk price, 1929-1937*



After 1934, milk was definitely a product to be in, with this and wheat being, after cattle, the next best performing products from 1935 onwards, as shown earlier in Figure 5.3 on page 236, and below in Figure 5.9, the latter based on actual prices at a Derbyshire dairy farm from March 1935 to the end of 1940.²⁵

²⁵ Pers. comm. Cathy Edge, (10 July 2014). Account book of the 100-acre farm, with 35-40 cows, relating to Ted Lawton, Hollies Farm, Yeldersley, Derbyshire between these dates. Comparison with Figure 5.8, albeit for liquid milk for consumption, shows that the price was flat from 1935-1937, and that further gains only took place after 1937. The cash at bank for Hollies Farm shows no overall change between June 1935 and December 1939 so, while, milk may have been the product to be in, only on a relative basis.

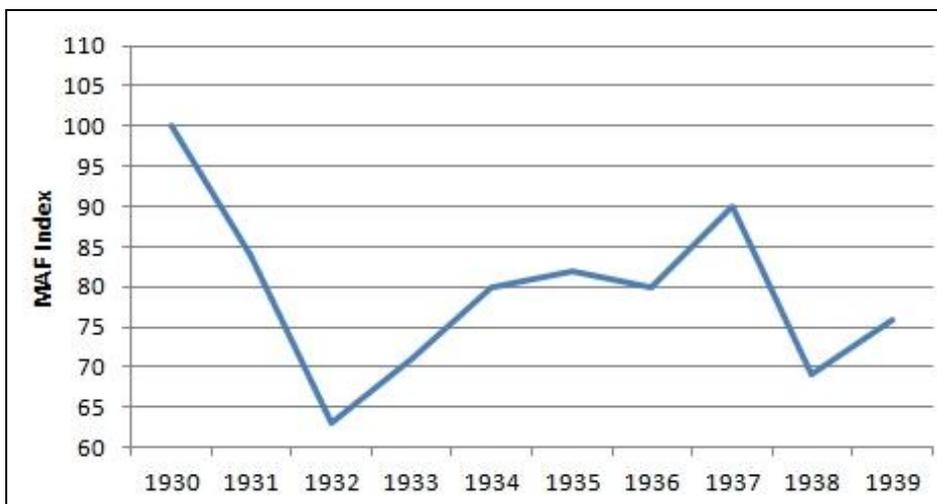
Figure 5.9: Price of milk for manufacturing from March 1935 to December 1940 from a farm in Derbyshire, with polynomial trend line added²⁶



However, the prices from 1934 onwards are very misleading, as they did not take into account the transport costs and maybe also the ‘pool’ deduction payable to the Milk Marketing Board.

The problems for the sheep farmer appear to have received very little attention in the discussions of local branches of the NFU, the columns of *Country Life*, or any other contemporary material. The sheep price index is shown in Figure 5.10.

Figure 5.10: Sheep price trend 1930-1939



²⁶ Records of Hollies Farm, Yeldersley, Derbyshire.

The trigger for the sheep price collapse was undoubtedly a huge increase in imports from the Empire. Because of the Ottawa agreement, government was powerless to do anything about these imports, so sheep farmers were left to their own devices.

By 1937, the national government had almost completed its intentions in terms of providing just enough support for farming to keep it afloat, with a final piece of legislation, the Agriculture Act 1937, which increased the amount of wheat that qualified for subsidy.

The period 1935-1939 is discussed in more detail from page 261 onwards.

Farming review in detail 1929-1934

The adverse situation in farming throughout 1928 and 1929 is shown in the Minute Books of the Northamptonshire, Warwickshire, Staffordshire and Derbyshire branches of the National Farmers' Union, and suggests that these organisations had no better idea than anyone else how to help their members. The NFU was ineffective in orchestrating any scheme of marketing centralisation, particularly in respect of milk, instead resorting to almost open warfare with the distributors. Dairy farmers in Derbyshire held mass meetings in August 1928 and September 1929, but it seems that these did not achieve anything.²⁷ The NFU procrastinated about the government giving unspecified help to relieve the plight of agriculture.²⁸ Part of the reason was an impasse between the Treasury and the Department of Agriculture, with the manifesto preference for quotas

²⁷ DRO, D 3264/2/1/6, minutes of meetings of Meetings of 24 August 1928 and 13 September 1929.

²⁸ DRO, D 3264/2/1/6, minutes of meeting of 6 December 1929.

over tariffs being strongly opposed by Philip Snowden, the Chancellor of the Exchequer. As a result agriculture took a back seat, as noted by *Country Life*.²⁹ The Northamptonshire branch of the Farmers' Union resorted to a multiplicity of eleven sub-committees suggestive more of a talking shop than effective help for its members, and it railed against the dumping of German wheat, which was supported by a bounty system.³⁰ The problem was that farming faced a Labour government which was not yet ready to resort to intervention, taking no action to meet its 1929 electoral pledge that 'farming must be made to pay' and that 'no nation can live except upon its production'. At Warwickshire's annual meeting at the end of 1929, the NFU President, John Garton, attended and told farmers that Noel Buxton thought the woes of agriculture exaggerated, and this despite the fact that wheat was now selling at 44s per quarter, less than its production cost. Farmers responded that there was no money in cattle or milk, and that German wheat and oats were being dumped.³¹ The implications of the Wall Street crash do not feature in the columns of *Country Life* at the end of 1929, conversely it being noted that the real estate market had stayed very strong.³² As far as farmers were concerned 'there was enough to worry about...for farmers to remain unaware of the antics of the Stock Exchange in New York'.³³

Farming was on its knees, as will be seen later from individual farmers' records, although *Country Life* persisted in assuring its readers that 'progressive' farming was the answer,

²⁹ M. Tichelar, 'The Labour Party and land reform in the inter-war period', *Rural History*, 13, 1 (2002), pp. 88-89. *CL*, 67, 1733 (5 April 1930), p. 490.

³⁰ NRO, ML 3818 and 3819, minutes between May 1928 and January 1930, *passim*.

³¹ WRO, CR 3157/1/4, minutes of meeting of 12 December 1929.

³² *CL*, 66, 1719 (28 December 1929), p. 943.

³³ Whetham, *Agrarian History, Volume 8*, p. 229.

and offered two examples.³⁴ The first was an arable farmer in Berkshire, who had gone over to artificial fertilisers only, removing all his livestock, and the other was progressive in an undefined way. The problem with these cases was that, as *Country Life* admitted, both had been losing money for many years, the latter example having only notched up a mere £100 of profit over the last ten years. These are, however, rare published pronouncements of the fortunes of individual farmers. Farmers started agitating for the abolition of the Agricultural Wages Act of 1924, arguing for a 10 percent reduction, justified by the fact that agricultural products were now only 35 percent above the pre-war level whereas they had been 66 percent above when wage rates were fixed. They also argued that the cost of living had fallen from 81 percent above pre-war levels in 1924 to 57 percent now.³⁵ There was discord between the head office and the branches of the NFU, whose farmers were at the sharp end of the effects of the dumping of agricultural products from overseas, and who wanted to see action against this included in the Marketing Act.³⁶ Relationships between government and farmers hit rock-bottom when Ramsay MacDonald, instead of agreeing to meet the farmers, gave an interview to the *Daily Herald* on 18 October 1930 and declared that ‘government would not yield an inch to the Farmers’ Union agitation for protection or a subsidy’.³⁷ And then he added ‘there can be no prosperity so long as the organised farmers want subsidies for inefficient agriculture and persist that everything in the world is wrong except their methods of carrying on business’. This insult was too much for farmers, but their wrath was not

³⁴ *CL*, 67, 1738 (10 May 1930), p. 664. *CL*, 68, 1754 (30 August 1930), p. 250.

³⁵ NRO, ML 3820, minutes of meeting of 4 October 1930.

³⁶ SRO, D 4995/1/3, minutes of meeting of 30 August. DRO, D 3264/2/1/7, minutes of meeting of 5 September 1930. NRO, ML 3820, minutes of meetings of 13 September 1930, 7 February 1931 and 7 March 1931.

³⁷ NRO, ML 3820, minutes of meeting of 1 November 1930.

limited to government but also to the Council of the NFU, who were immediately urged to try and build bridges with the Ministry of Agriculture.³⁸ This probably represented the lowest point during the study period in the relationship between government and the farmers' representatives.

Arable was the worst hit sector, so bad that land agents, Knight, Frank and Rutley, in their report on the market for 1930, declared that 'purely agricultural estates and holdings, especially those consisting mainly of arable, have been less easy to dispose of, and the prices...have been generally on the lower level...'³⁹ Dairying had been a relatively bright spot in the gloom, and had been largely immune from any foreign competition in the 1920s, but in 1930 dumping of milk had led to the temporary collapse of the guaranteed price system, which had benefited farmers since it had been introduced by the co-operatives.⁴⁰ The Agricultural Marketing Act of 1931, had been launched in the King's Speech in October 1930, where the hope that it would save agriculture was described by Viscount Lympington as 'like a shipwrecked mariner who desires to use the sea for the purposes of communication with the outer world, putting a message in a bottle and floating it on the seas without putting in a cork. The first wave of foreign competition will sink such a scheme at once.'⁴¹ The Bill was presented on 18 December 1930 and was under discussion until July 1931 when it received Royal Assent.⁴² Once on the Statute Book, the Northamptonshire branch of the NFU set about to work with it, bringing

³⁸ NRO, ML 3820, minutes of Special Meeting of the County executive 8 November 1930. SRO, D 4995/1/3, minutes of meeting of 15 November 1930.

³⁹ *CL*, 68, 1772 (3 January 1931), p. 25.

⁴⁰ Brown, *Agriculture in England. A Survey of Farming*, pp. 107-110. *CL*, 67, 1735 (19 April 1930), p. 558.

⁴¹ B.P.P., HC, 30 October 1930, CCXLIV, 308.

⁴² B.P.P., HC, 31 July 1931, CCLV, 2687.

forward a 17-point proposal, while the National Council fought a rearguard action to oppose it in a marathon three-hour discussion.⁴³ The Council, reluctant to support this Act, was finally bludgeoned into so doing by its county branches soon after.⁴⁴

In agricultural terms this was a turning point and it was left to the conservative-dominated national government in 1931 to make a major change in policy. It acted quickly, and by December 1931, there was a proposal for a wheat quota scheme requiring that 15 percent of milled supplies be grown in this country, but *Country Life* did not understand why this was not to be applied to barley as well.⁴⁵ The government's Wheat Act 1932 developed out of this and had its Second Reading at the beginning of March 1932. While it passed with a comfortable majority, it was not without its critics and had gone through contortions so as not to be seen to be helping the cereal grower at the expense of other sectors of the community.⁴⁶ It operated by a quota system and the funds necessary to meet the costs were raised by a tax payable by millers and flour importers on their flour outputs. The 'standard price' was fixed at 45. per quarter, and came into force with the first payments in 1933 in respect of wheat harvested in 1932. The scheme worked well both in fiscal terms and in terms of increasing the wheat acreage, as was

⁴³ NRO, ML 3820, minutes of meetings of 22 July 1931, 21 November 1931 and 5 December 1931.

⁴⁴ J. Brown, 'Agricultural policy and the National Farmers' Union, 1908-1938', in J. Wordie (ed.), *Agriculture and Politics in England, 1815-1939* (Basingstoke, 2000), p. 190.

⁴⁵ *CL*, 70, 1820 (5 December 1931), p. 606.

⁴⁶ Dr. Salter, the labour member for Bermondsey was particularly loquacious. He was unimpressed with the propping up of one small section of the agricultural community, preferring a much broader re-organisation including land nationalisation and a better lot for the worker. He set the scene of the bread-eating habits of the poor of the time, with families of six or seven children consuming 40 or more loaves a week and a bread bill of 13-14s. He maintained that these people would effectively pay this subsidy, see B.P.P., HC, 1 March 1932, CCLXII, 979 and 983-4.

shown in Figure 5.5 on page 239. The biggest relief was probably seen in East Anglia, where the position had become so acute that the value of agricultural land had ‘reduced to vanishing point’ with one case of a well-equipped farm, with a reserve of £3 per acre, having not received a bid.⁴⁷ The legislation resulted in the acreage under wheat increasing by about a third between 1932 and 1934, while production jumped by nearly 50 percent, but this was partly due to the very favourable weather conditions in 1933 and 1934.⁴⁸ The legislation also set in train an improvement in the farm sales market.⁴⁹

While arable had received a fillip by 1932, livestock farming was suffering with the executive of the Northamptonshire branch of the NFU having noted that ‘feeders and graziers had lost 75 percent of their capital in the last few years’.⁵⁰ No detailed accounts of individual farming bankruptcies have been found, but John Moore, in *Portrait of Elmbury*, offers what must certainly be one such.⁵¹ His hapless farmer had made a good living on a 280-acre mixed holding for fifteen years, so perhaps the account is from 1931.⁵² The depression would then have been into its third year as Moore refers to a ‘mystic saying’ that things go in threes, leading this farmer to believe that better times were around the corner. As a result, he decided to go into cattle dealing to which end he borrowed a further £500 against his property and bought fifty yearlings for £10 each.

Figure 5.4, page 238, showed that the cattle price had been on a gentle slide since 1928

⁴⁷ Turnor, *Yeoman Calling*, p. 40.

⁴⁸ A. Plummer, ‘Experiments in wheat control’, *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 49, 2 (1935), pp. 356-8.

⁴⁹ *CL*, 72, 1852 (16 July 1932), p. 82. *CL*, 72, 1859 (3 September 1932), p. 280.

⁵⁰ NRO, ML 3821, minutes of meeting of 5 March 1932.

⁵¹ J. Moore, *Portrait of Elmbury* (1945, London, 1953), pp. 146-149.

⁵² The farmer would have needed the benefit of the good years from 1916-1920 to fit Moore’s description.

and that between 1930 and 1931, it fell a further ten percent, which this farmer found out when he came to sell in the autumn market. Thereafter, everything conspired against him; there was a shortage of hay which cost him dearly; he was eventually forced to sell his cattle for £8 15s 0d each; 1932 was a poor growing season; and his indebtedness caught up with him and the lender foreclosed.⁵³ Similar stories must have been repeated many times in this period, as was shown by the bankruptcy statistics, Figure 3.36 on page 87, with these peaking between 1931 and 1933.

The dairy industry was in the throes of serious pricing issues. In January 1932, the Somerset branch brought a resolution to the Annual General Meeting supporting an approach to government to set up a reorganisation commission for milk. This was opposed by the leadership of the NFU, but was passed by the meeting by the narrowest of majorities, 97 in favour to 94 against, and seems to have been the moment when the leaders of the NFU finally fell into step with their members. In the autumn of 1932, discussions between milk producers and distributors finally broke down and the NFU threw in the towel and *faute de mieux* demanded that a compulsory marketing scheme be introduced as soon as possible. The scheme took another year, but in July 1933, Government agreed a proposal worked up by the Milk Reorganisation Commission and the National Farmers' Union for a twelve-month scheme under which producers were to receive the same price for their milk irrespective of whether it was sold for liquid consumption or for manufacture.⁵⁴ The introduction of the scheme required the support

⁵³ The Oxford weather statistics show that May was particularly cold and wet, and that June was cooler than usual and very dry, see The Meteorological Office, 'Oxford data'.

⁵⁴ J. Empson, 'The history of the Milk Marketing Board, 1933-1994: British farmers' greatest commercial enterprise', *International Journal of Dairy Technology*, 53, 1 (August 1998), pp. 77-8. Brown, 'Agricultural policy and the National Farmers' Union', pp. 190-2. Baker, *Milk to*

of a poll of producers, which delivered a 96 percent majority in favour, with the scheme starting on 6 October 1933. The basis of the scheme was that a 'pool' price, about midway between the prices of liquid milk and milk for manufacturing, was paid to farmers, who also had to pay a levy to the Board. Initially, farmers mistakenly thought that the purpose of the Board was to stand behind them in the price negotiation with the distributors while, in fact, the Board itself had no powers to 'fix' the price of milk. In its initial period, the whole process nearly foundered as the first price for milk was agreed for the period October 1933 to March 1934 by an arbitration panel which, to the disgust of farmers who had wanted 15d per gallon, determined a price of only 12d.⁵⁵ This led to a unanimous proposal by the Northamptonshire branch of the National Farmers' Union to have the three arbitrators and the arbitration procedure removed from the process.⁵⁶ The price for the next six-month period was fixed considerably higher, such that the average price for the first full year was 13.99d per gallon. So the protests faded away, and soon after, a meeting of the registered producers (there were 141,000 at the time), gave the Milk Marketing Board an overwhelming vote of confidence.⁵⁷ The meeting noted that under-cutting of the liquid milk price had now stopped, with *Country Life* urging the government to promote higher milk consumption and to reward the farmers more. The scheme fulfilled its promises seeing off a challenge in 1934 to the price by Nestlé in Cumberland, who responded by setting up their own creamery locally.⁵⁸ In Staffordshire, because he was a local man from Sutton Coldfield to whom they had 'access', they

Market, pp. 65, 69-70, 74-5, 90. Mowat, *Britain between the Wars*, pp. 438-9. Cooper, *British Agricultural Policy*, pp. 172-3. B.P.P., HC, 27 July 1933, CCLXXX, 2912-2944.

⁵⁵ NRO, ML 3823, minutes of meetings of 17 February 1934, 3 March 1934. It was noted that Walter Elliot, the Minister of Agriculture, had his hands tied because of the Ottawa agreements.

⁵⁶ NRO, ML 3823, minutes of meetings of 24 March 1934 and 5 May 1934.

⁵⁷ *CL*, 75, 1952 (16 June 1934), p. 613.

⁵⁸ Empson, 'The history of the Milk Marketing Board', p. 79.

championed Tom Baxter to become a member of the Milk Marketing Board, and ultimately he became its president.⁵⁹ Despite its teething troubles, the scheme was renewed, becoming the Milk Marketing Board.⁶⁰ For over 60 years, until it was abolished in 1994, this Board acted to protect the farmer's income.⁶¹

While dairy businesses benefited from the Milk Marketing Board, the slump in prices of fat cattle continued into 1933 and 1934, with local reports that cattle, in June 1933, were worth less than the price at which they had been bought in at the beginning of the year, and £5-6 below their price a year earlier.⁶² By September the Northamptonshire branch of the National Farmers' Union declared that graziers were 'finding it increasingly impossible to carry on their businesses'.⁶³ At the end of the year, government finally signalled its intention to strengthen the position of the livestock farmer, and its first action was to prohibit import of beef from the Irish Free State and reduce imports of fat cattle for slaughter by half, effective early in 1934, but these had not helped the price of

⁵⁹ SRO, D 4995/1/5, minutes of meetings of 27 May 1933 and 28 April 1934.

⁶⁰ B.P.P., HL, 1934, 30 October 1934, XCIV, 2-22.

⁶¹ Leader article, *Sunday Telegraph* (15 July 2012). A. Collacott, 'The Milk Board once protected dairy farmers', *Sunday Telegraph* 22 July 2012. When, in 1994, the Board was wound up, neither producers nor the NFU made any attempt to stop this arguing, as they did just after the Great War, that farmers would do better in a free market. So in July 2012, with a price reduction of two pence per litre being imposed and effectively meaning that farmers are producing milk at a loss, the free market situation seems to be the same as in 1922, simply that it does not work.

⁶² NRO, ML 3822, minutes of meeting of 24 June 1933. J. Watson, *Rural Britain To-day and To-morrow* (London, 1934), p.66. Watson, Sibthorpe Professor of Rural economy at Oxford, undertook a Cobbett-style tour of England in 1933 and one of the farms that he visited near Market Harborough reported the expectation of losing £4 per head of his 1690 beast when he sold them in the autumn.

⁶³ NRO, ML 3822, minutes of meeting of 2 September 1933.

beef by March of that year.⁶⁴ Yet again government was hampered by the 1932 Ottawa Agreement to do anything about the 37 percent increase in imported beef from 1909-1913 to 1927-1931, whereas the consuming population had only increased 9 percent over the same period.⁶⁵ The Northamptonshire branch of the National Farmers' Union became more strident about the parlous state of cattle-fattening, so welcomed the news in June 1934 that a levy scheme with deficiency payments looked as though it was likely.⁶⁶ The Cattle Industry (Emergency Provisions) Act 1934 was passed, with little or no opposition, in July 1934.⁶⁷ It was supposed to alleviate the position of cattle-fattening farmers, but the subsidy of 5s per hundredweight was eaten into by a fall of 2/7d in the price in 1935. The lower prices of cereal crops were of no benefit to these farmers either, as they fattened their cattle on grass and hay.⁶⁸ The subsidy had a very minimal effect on the fortunes of farmers as can be seen from the farms which were studied. This is also confirmed by a further study in 1935 by the Cambridge Farm Economics Branch, based on 220 farms that were surveyed in 1933 (of which 170 were involved in the 1931 and 1932 studies).⁶⁹ This showed that overall farm income was broadly the same as in 1933; that farm incomes before subsidies had improved, while subsidy payments had reduced by a similar amount; and that gross income had increased by 14 percent, while costs had risen by 17.5 percent.

⁶⁴ *CL*, 74, 1926 (16 December 1933), p. 640. *CL*, 74, 1928 (30 December 1933), p. 695. *CL*, 75, 1939 (17 March 1934), p. 263.

⁶⁵ *CL*, 75, 1944 (21 April 1934), p. 394. NRO, ML 3823, minutes of meeting of 24 March 1934.

⁶⁶ NRO, ML 3823, minutes of meeting of 2 June 1934.

⁶⁷ B.P.P., HC, 19 July 1934, CCXCII, 1289-1346.

⁶⁸ Whetham, *Agrarian History*, Volume 8, p. 245.

⁶⁹ DOA University of Cambridge, *Changes in the Economic Organisation of Agriculture: A Comparative study of Conditions in the Eastern Counties of England in 1933 and 1935 (Report No. 23)*, Cambridge, (1936).

The plight of sheep farmers appears to have warranted scant attention, with much more time being spent by NFU branches on the problems of fat cattle and dairying. References are made by the Northamptonshire branch to sheep graziers having lost, in common with their cattle brethren, three-quarters of their capital in 1932.⁷⁰

The county Wages Committees were continuing to push up wages despite the farmers arguing that wages were now 100 percent above pre-war levels, while agricultural prices were only up nine percent. The workers' representatives also seemed to think that they had a right to share in the multi-million pounds of subsidies being handed out by government.⁷¹

The price of, and market for, agricultural land was seriously affected with agents, Bidwells, referring to stagnation in 1932.⁷² Resourceful land agents like David Royce in Rutland were, reportedly, not deterred by the lack of buyers with Scott Murray, another land agent whose father had worked for Royce, recounting a story of Royce knocking a farm down to a farmer who had not bid, but telling him "don't you worry, I'll sort it out with your father". Royce was by then a financier as well as land agent lending money to farmers to buy their farms and stock and left £0.75m when he died, so he was clearly successful. So too was the farmer who took the farm with the loan, as the family were still big farmers in 1990.⁷³ By the middle of 1933, it was reported that investors were

⁷⁰ NRO, ML 3821, minutes of meeting of 5 March 1932.

⁷¹ NRO, ML 3823, Annual General Meeting Minutes 20 January 1934. Minutes of meeting of 6 October 1934. This argument was also taken by MPs when they debated the renewal of the Cattle Act of 1934, see B.P.P., HC, 19 July 1935, CCCIV, 1389-1421.

⁷² *CL*, 73, 1877 (7 January 1933), p. 26.

⁷³ N. Duckers *et al*, *A Place in the Country* (London, 1990), p. 50. Scott Murray also observed that many farmers did not make it through the recession years of the 1930s.

buying up farms at around one-third of their price in the heyday of the 1870s.⁷⁴ Rents, which had been falling in the 1920s, had declined to pre-war levels by 1933, and these reached their nadir in 1936.⁷⁵ Although many large houses were demolished or sold for non-residential use, there was the advent of ‘new’ money to see other estates continue. Indeed, as noted on page 228, the author’s grandfather bought a 600-acre farm in Sussex in 1934.

Overall, agriculture had probably now touched bottom and was, very slowly, on the way up, but not quite in the terms suggested by *Country Life* whose leader writer commented ‘nowhere is the brightening horizon more obvious than in agriculture’.⁷⁶ He saw the efforts of Walter Elliot, the Minister of Agriculture, bearing fruit through the various subsidy schemes, which gave farmers security, and the marketing Acts as having created an industry that was no longer ‘a collection of little units, but now benefiting from group organisation’. Elliot is credited for much of the improvement in agriculture, but some of the measures, such as quotas and subsidies, could only have been introduced by a national government.⁷⁷ The launch of *Farmers Weekly* in June 1934 perhaps underscores the turning of a corner, with this publication being launched as a ‘newspaper of the soil’,

⁷⁴ *CL*, 73, 1897 (27 May 1933), p. 538.

⁷⁵ Howkins, *Death of Rural England*, p. 61.

⁷⁶ *CL*, 76, 1979 (22 December 1934), p. 656. J. Watson, *Rural Britain To-day and To-morrow* (London, 1934), pp. 143-5. In his interview with farmer Simmons of Newbury, Watson found a similar mood of optimism as well as acceptance of the various Marketing Boards. Simmons referred to fellow farmers ‘going under’, with many having had ‘pretty close calls themselves’, and in consequence the current generation of farmers being prepared to ‘put up with many bothers and annoyances’ in order to see farming prosper again.

⁷⁷ *CL*, 76, 1960 (11 August 1934), p. 132.

the journal stated that it had one fundamental policy, which was to see more agricultural production in Britain.⁷⁸

Contemporary farming research in the period 1931-1934

Messer's enquiry into the agricultural depression, carried out in 1931, found more evidence of a depressed state of agriculture than the earlier one of 1929, referred to on pages 225-226.⁷⁹ Larger farms were suffering due to the relatively high cost of labour, as were farms with a higher percentage of arable, while stock farming was generally not so adversely affected. Messer updated observations on the position in the counties, on which he had reported in 1928, noting in 1931 that graziers in Leicestershire were now seeking reductions in rent of up to 20 percent, and that mixed farms with a large arable proportion were even worse affected. Elsewhere, the noteworthy conclusions were that the position in Rutland was very serious, with most tenants asking their landlords to pay for grass seed to lay the arable down; that in Staffordshire larger farms with a higher proportion of arable were requiring considerable rent reductions; and that in Warwickshire, farms of 150 to 600 acres were difficult to let without spending on improvements. So, there were early signs of a more serious situation and a year later in 1932 as the report was published, Messer found it necessary to insert a foreword to the report:

Since this inquiry was set afoot, the position of farming has changed, quite definitely for the worse...The prices of cereals, which were low, have fallen lower; the security of the stock-breeder has been shaken by the drop in values at the autumn sales in 1931. Prospects, on the other hand are better, at all events, for the arable farmer. The wheat harvest of 1932 will yield a certain profit under the Wheat Bill; prices of barley and oats will benefit from the duty on imports.

⁷⁸ <http://www.fwi.co.uk/articles/07/01/2005/19863/the-life-and-times-of-farmers-weekly.htm> [accessed 6 May 2013].

⁷⁹ Messer, *The Agricultural Depression of 1931*, pp. 5-6, 16-32.

Reference has been made on pages 12-14 and 151-152 to the most comprehensive research carried out by the Farm Economics branch of the Department of Agriculture at the University of Cambridge, and it is pertinent to include a limited analysis of this for the period 1931-1933. In 1931, it embarked on a study of the financial aspects of farming in the Eastern Counties of England.⁸⁰ In its scope, this was almost certainly the most ambitious project of its type ever undertaken. Data was collected by visiting and interrogating each farmer personally, and did not rely on farmers habitually keeping records as only 17 percent of those involved in the project did so.⁸¹ There were 983 farms surveyed in the first year and of these, 85 percent were mixed and individual farm sizes ranged from 20 acres to more than 500 acres, with 55 percent (by acreage) being in the range 150 to 500 acres. In each of the 1931-1933 reports, there is a written analysis of some ten profitable farms; and in the 1933 report of four unprofitable ones, examining how these could have become more profitable. If representative, the criticisms of these four farms might indicate some of the problems in farming, but comments such as ‘lack of initiative’; ‘more sugar beet should be grown’; ‘nothing is spent on fertilisers’ suggest a broader educational agenda. The authors admitted, that certain handicaps outside the control of the occupier mean that farming might not be able to be profitable ‘under the present price and cost relationships’.⁸² To show how uninformative it is to compare different farms over a three-year period, the outcomes of the ten profitable farms are

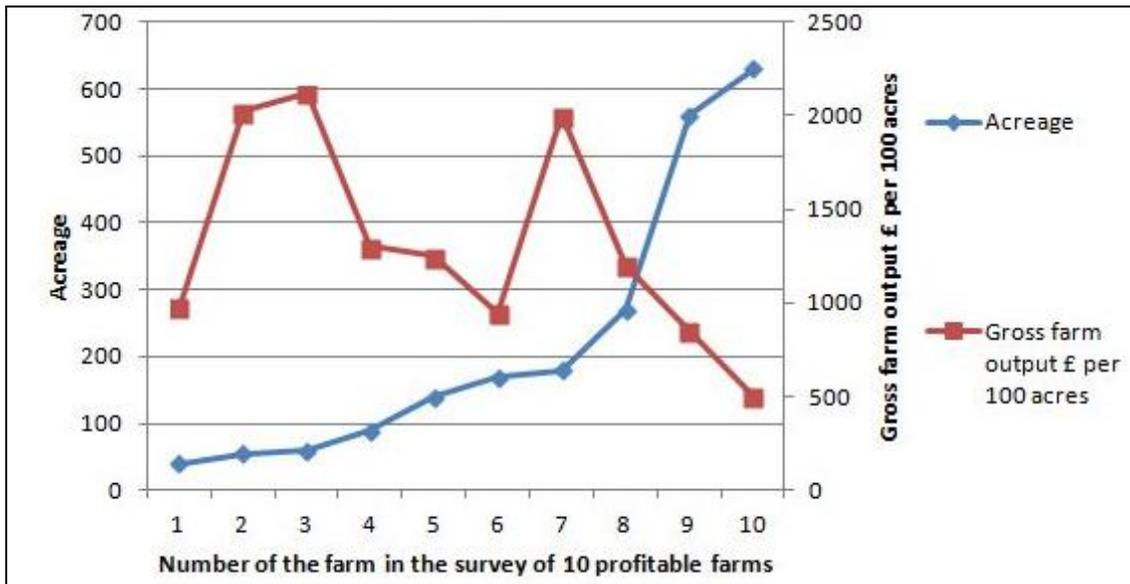
⁸⁰ DOA, University of Cambridge, *An Economic Survey*. There were three such reports covering the years 1931, 1932 and 1933, each published a year later. They are, respectively Reports numbers 19, 21 and 22.

⁸¹ DOA, University of Cambridge, *An Economic Survey, Report 21*, p. 80.

⁸² DOA, University of Cambridge, *An Economic Survey, Report 22*, pp. 46-52.

shown graphically in Figure 5.11 with their acreage and gross output per farm per 100 acres, there being no apparent link between farm size and profit.⁸³

Figure 5.11: *Graph showing variability of profit compared with acreage over a three year period*

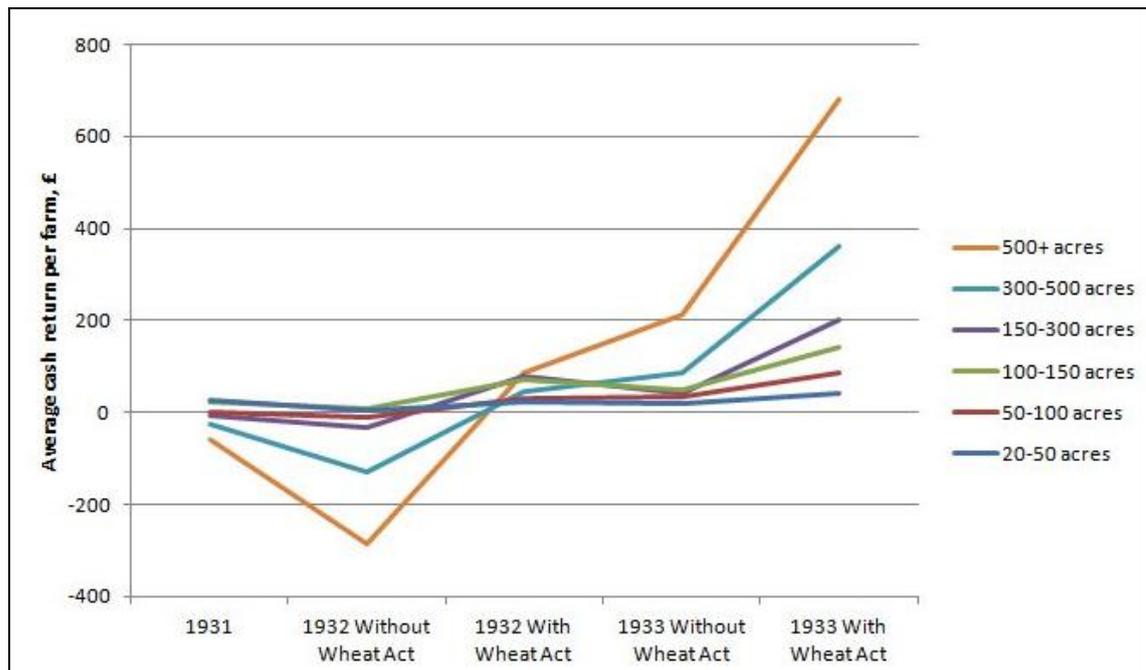


The extent of analysis in these reports is far beyond the scope of this thesis, and the three reports themselves would support a study on farming in these eastern counties, albeit just for the three years. In the reports, farms are banded in acreage sizes and Figure 5.12 shows the trend of profitability for the differing farm sizes.⁸⁴

⁸³ Graph prepared by author from data in DOA, University of Cambridge, *An Economic Survey, Report 22*, p. 31.

⁸⁴ Graph prepared by author from data in DOA, University of Cambridge, *An Economic Survey, Report 22*, p. 17. The reports go on to make allowances for the owner farmer's time and notional return on his capital. The figures in the graph are before such notional adjustments.

Figure 5.12: Average cash return per farm across a range of farm sizes, 1931-1933



For 1932 and 1933, there are two lines shown, with and without the Wheat Act subsidy. The figures collected were based on sales and Wheat Act subsidies applicable to the particular crop year. This shows that the cash return per farm increased with farm size. It also shows the beneficial effect of the Wheat Act subsidy. The increased return, before subsidy payments, in 1933 is explained in the University of Cambridge Report 22 as being due to better cropping conditions that year. The much greater benefit of the subsidy payment for large farms, as against small ones, was also commented upon, but this is very clear in the graph from the deep yellow and light blue lines. The farm size range of 50-300 acres, particularly pertinent to this thesis, was based on a sample of over 600 farms, some 200 farms for each of the three bands in that range. As a result, considerable reliance can be placed on the absolute cash profit figure per farm size. There is a very clear message from this graph that farming, which was in the doldrums in 1931, worsened considerably in 1932 before the Wheat Act payments came to its rescue and, improved very significantly in 1933 on account of a better harvest as well as the subsidy payments.

Contemporary commentary in the period 1931-1934

Not all of A. G. Street's books were fictional novels, and *Country Life* quotes his conclusions from *Land Everlasting*.⁸⁵ Published in 1934, his book reviews the post-war history of farming and the political approaches that took place, and examines influences from other factors such as currency and gold.⁸⁶ *Country Life* summarised Street's conclusions that there was only a future for an agriculture which involved the production of perishable foodstuffs, with the author pleading the cause of animal husbandry and market gardening in preference to wheat. Street referred to the survey by the University of Cambridge for the year 1931, pointing out that even in this substantially arable area of East Anglia, the arable element in terms of gross income for the six counties surveyed was only 31.5 percent of the total income; and thus making the point that while acreage of arable may have been in the 70 percent range, livestock was far more important economically.⁸⁷ Street weighed into the debate on subsidies and quotas, in the context of the Ottawa agreement, see page 252.⁸⁸ He pointed out that the country's wheat output, at two percent of farming's total, was by then benefiting from an annual subsidy of a mere £5m *p.a.*, but that if the same level of subsidy were to be applied to the 72 percent of farming represented by animal husbandry, the resulting cost would be an absurdly unaffordable £180m.⁸⁹ While the book is an interesting dissertation on the state of farming in the interwar year period up to 1934, Street did not have any panaceas. However, under the exalted heading of 'a turning point in our agricultural history', he set

⁸⁵ *CL*, 75, 1954 (30 June 1934), p. 678.

⁸⁶ A. Street, *Land Everlasting* (London, 1934). The chapter on currency and gold was written by his brother, P. Street.

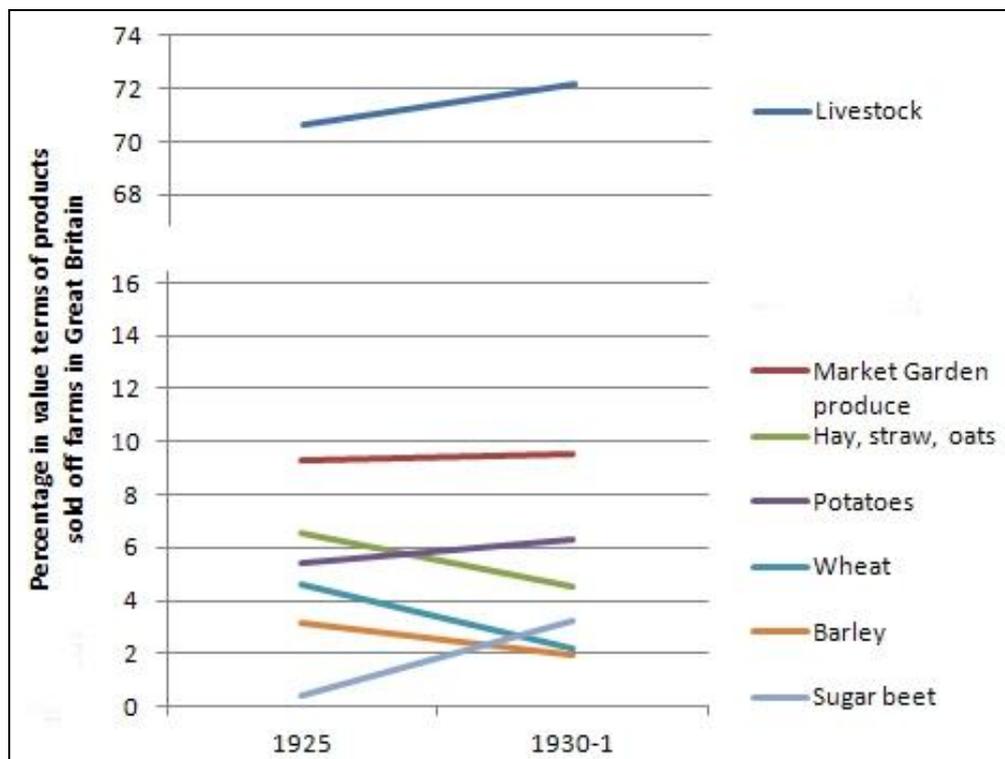
⁸⁷ Street, *Land Everlasting*, pp. 76-7.

⁸⁸ Street, *Land Everlasting*, pp. 175, 193.

⁸⁹ Street, *Land Everlasting*, pp. 192-203.

out a case-study of a farmer of 600 acres in Berkshire who had followed two of his holy grails of ‘anything-but-wheat’ and ‘innovation’ by introducing open-air dairying, and who had prospered as a result.⁹⁰ Street argued that the economic benefit of livestock far outweighed that of arable, and wheat in particular. The graph in Figure 5.13 with the vertical axis truncated, has a very compelling message.⁹¹ Street totally failed to see why successive governments had an agricultural policy based on wheat-growing which only ‘fiddled about with a minor part of British farming’. Politicians and the NFU alike asserted that it was a pivotal crop, whereas Street opined that, in reality, all good grain-growing depended on animal husbandry.⁹²

Figure 5.13: *Percentage in value terms of products sold off farms in Great Britain, 1925 and 1930-1931*



⁹⁰ Street, *Land Everlasting*, pp. 273-287.

⁹¹ Street, *Land Everlasting*, pp. 28-9 was used by the author to prepare this graph.

⁹² Street, *Land Everlasting*, pp. 30, 73-4, 191.

Another contemporary commentator was Christopher Turnor who, from 1929, had campaigned strongly for agricultural reform. *Inter alia* he had argued against land nationalisation; for the individuality of farming, albeit with farmers banding into co-operatives; the proper provision of long-term credit to enable farmers to buy; and the development of an effective system of education.⁹³ Further reference is made to these views on page 274.

A perspective from the market in land

The state of the land market provides another perspective on this period. Agents, Bidwells, had summarised the years back to 1928 in true estate agent's parlance, noting 1928 as 'depression'; 1929 'stagnation'; 1930 'uncertainty'; 1931 'expectancy'; 1932 'opportunity'; 1933 'renewed activity'; and 1934 'investment'. They commented that 1935 had been the busiest year since 1921.⁹⁴ The 'keen demand for good farms' had to be tempered with 'far fewer farms have changed hands...', with Bidwells commenting that they had dreaded to think what state agriculture would have been in had the various government initiatives not been put in place.

Farming review in detail 1935-1939

With the wheat deficiency and cattle subsidy payments in place, and milk prices 'under control' through the Milk Marketing Board, it is tempting to think, as did *Country Life*, that farming's 1930s problems were now behind them, but this was certainly not the case.⁹⁵ This view was probably behind the government's decision to continue beyond the

⁹³ C. Turnor, *The Land: Agriculture and National Economy* (London, 1929), pp. 60-80.

⁹⁴ *CL*, 79, 2033 (4 January 1936), Estate Market, p. 26.

⁹⁵ *CL*, 77, 1983 (19 January 1935), p. 54.

next general election the sugar beet and cattle subsidies, the latter originally intended as a short-term measure.⁹⁶ The wheat deficiency scheme, while still in place, was benefiting farmers less as the area under wheat had grown from 1.196m acres in 1931 to 1.771m acres in 1935.⁹⁷ And with an extraordinarily good harvest of eight million quarters in 1934 the subsidy, which was a fixed sum based on a maximum of six million quarters, was scaled back so that farmers only received 75 percent of the subsidy per quarter.⁹⁸

At the beginning of 1935, beef prices were now less than pre-war levels, and some 20-30s less per head than in 1933.⁹⁹ This was confirmed by Herwald Ramsbotham, Conservative MP for Lancaster and Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, noting that the unsubsidised price of fat stock had plumbed the depths in 1935, as shown earlier on page 240 by the cattle price index in Figure 5.6, which clearly also shows that the subsidy had helped an upward trend from 1934 onwards.¹⁰⁰ The 1934 Act had put subsidies in place until March 1935, but then the first extending Act was passed continuing these for the next three months, and then later until September 1935.

Recognising that the House would not be sitting on 1 October, the Cattle Industry (Emergency Provisions) (No. 2) Act 1935 was passed on 2 August 1935, which prolonged the subsidy period to 30 June 1936, with an extension of four months to 31 October, later confirmed by Parliament.¹⁰¹ In July 1936, the subsidy limit had been increased from £3.885m to £5m, a figure that *Country Life* doubted would achieve the

⁹⁶ *CL*, 78, 2009 (19 July 1935), p. 55.

⁹⁷ Cooper, *British Agricultural Policy*, p. 194.

⁹⁸ NRO, ML 3824, minutes of meeting of 2 March 1935. *CL*, 78, 2015 (31 August 1935), p.210.

⁹⁹ NRO, ML 3824, minutes of meeting 2 February 1935.

¹⁰⁰ B.P.P., HC, 29 June 1936, CCCXIV, 178.

¹⁰¹ B.P.P., HC, 29 June 1936, CCCXIV, 177-8.

government's stated objective of stabilising and improving the home market.¹⁰² While benefits were accruing to farmers, Labour member Wilfred Paling argued, to no avail, that agricultural labourers had benefited only to some £0.5m 'in an industry like this where such a miserably low wage is paid, [and] £53m of public money poured into the industry to help it, surely it is not asking too much that at least a fair proportion of that money should find its way in wages into the pockets of the workers'.¹⁰³

The general agricultural situation was clearly still dire with the Northamptonshire branch of the Farmers' Union organising a deputation to county MPs at Westminster on 7 July 1936.¹⁰⁴ Their complaints acted as a very good summary of the problems of farming at this time. Agricultural prices, which had been only 22 percent above pre-war levels in May 1931, were now lower and only 20 percent above such levels, and this inclusive of subsidy payments. Wages, on the other hand, had increased from 30s to 31/6d over the period 1931-1936. Wheat, which had been 53s per quarter in 1924, was now only 39/7d including the wheat deficiency subsidy payment.

Livestock showed a similarly serious position with the price of home fat cattle having fallen by 15s per cwt. since 1928. This was only offset by a subsidy of five shillings per cwt, which only applied to certain classes of cattle. After 1933, beef production rose with the number of fat cattle increasing, as reported by Ramsbotham.¹⁰⁵ Between the winter of

¹⁰² B.P.P., HC, 13 July 1936, CCCXIV, 1705. NRO, ML 3825, minutes of meeting of 25 July 1936. *CL*, 80, 2082 (12 December 1936), p. 616.

¹⁰³ B.P.P., HC, 19 July 1935, CCCIV, 1391. From the Second Reading of Cattle Industry (Emergency Provisions) (No. 2) Act.

¹⁰⁴ NRO, ML 3825, minutes of this deputation dated 7 July 1936.

¹⁰⁵ B.P.P., HC, 29 June 1936, CCCXIV, 178-9.

1933-1934 and 1934-1935, it had increased by 22 percent, with a further 11 percent increase by the winter of 1935-1936. Although part of that increase was due to the diversion of sales through markets in order to secure certification, Ramsbotham was in no doubt that home supplies of beef in 1934-1935 had shown an increase over the previous year, and he reminded the House that it takes three years to produce beef. Supplies from the Dominions and the Argentine were unabated, these having been re-negotiated with imports for the first six months of 1936 set to be no higher than they had been for the same period in 1935 and with further discussions promised for a reduction.¹⁰⁶ Farmers were demanding reductions in imports of all meat and livestock products in order to stave off the 'continued depression in the livestock industry'.¹⁰⁷ The Staffordshire branch of the Farmers' Union considered that government was still not doing enough to stabilise the market and secure further extension of beef production.¹⁰⁸ Despite being hampered by its many trade agreements, action on controlling imports of beef finally came on the government's agenda with the Livestock Industry Bill going through its various stages in 1937.¹⁰⁹ The proposed level of subsidy was to be maintained at £5m, and there were to be duties on foreign chilled beef and other beef products and import were to be regulated. Certainly Earl Alexander of Hillsborough thought that the House had been taken for a ride, pointing out that the figures of the livestock industry did not justify 'the tale of woe that has been poured out in speech after speech', with a huge increase in the actual numbers of livestock between 1930 and 1936, and an enormous increase in the number of cattle which had earned the subsidy in the last two and a half years with over 1.7m for

¹⁰⁶ NRO, ML 3825, minutes of meeting 29 February 1936.

¹⁰⁷ NRO, ML 3825, minutes of meetings of 4 April 1936 and 7 July 1936.

¹⁰⁸ SRO, D 4995/1/6, minutes of meeting of 15 August 1936.

¹⁰⁹ B.P.P., HC, 20 January 1937, CCCXIX, 187-190. *CL*, 81, 2089 (30 January 1937), p. 110. *CL*, 82, 2115 (31 July 1937), p. 106.

1936.¹¹⁰ He concluded that there was no evidence that the livestock industry had stopped breeding and fattening, and that continuance of the subsidy was unnecessary. The figures for beef consumption had gone down by 11 per cent between 1927 and 1933, with no figures after that date, while mutton had increased by 26 per cent.¹¹¹ So, with imports remaining high, beef consumption down and the number of cattle up, there seems to be an unexplained paradox that pre-subsidy prices nevertheless improved after 1935.¹¹² The extent of subsidy had been £1.9m in the seven months of 1934, £3.6m in 1935 and £3.7m in 1936.¹¹³

The woes of the fat cattle industry up to 1936 were shown in Figure 5.3, page 236, and the reasons for this are quite clear from figures provided by Anthony Hurd.¹¹⁴ Between 1930 and 1936, imports from the Empire had risen from 10-23 percent for beef; 64-84 percent for mutton and lamb; 87-90 percent for cheese; 45-53 percent for butter; and 5-24 percent for bacon. Hurd maintained that this had impacted on farming such that the output of the land had been barely maintained, but was pleased to note that the United

¹¹⁰ B.P.P., HC, 20 January 1937, CCCXIX, 408-9.

¹¹¹ B.P.P., HC, 21 January 1937, CCCXIX, 375.

¹¹² B.P.P., HC, 30 November 1937, CCCXXIX, 1895. There is a table of changes in agricultural prices inserted, without reference, in the Hansard proceedings. This shows enormous rises in individual prices between 1935 and 1937, calculated percentage increases being wheat 49, barley 52, oats 38, cattle, about 25, sheep 10. Yet on 28 July 1937, Miss Lloyd George had pointed out that cattle prices in 1936 were lower than in 1935, see B.P.P., HC, 28 July 1937, CCCXXVI, p. 3180. It has to be said that the official figures from 1937 seem to be 'all over the place', so it is perhaps debatable as to whether prices increased to the extent that some of these claim.

¹¹³ B.P.P., HC, 2 November 1937, CCCXXVIII, 737 and B.P.P., HC, 7 December 1937, CCCXXX, 1487.

¹¹⁴ *CL*, 81, 2104 (15 May 1937), p. 526. Hurd (the father of Douglas Hurd), farmed 480 acres in Wiltshire and later was Agricultural Liaison officer of the Ministry of Agriculture. In his book *A. Hurd, A Farmer in Whitehall. Britain's Farming Revolution 1939-1950 and Future Prospects* (London, 1951), he recounts that between 1926 and 1939, his farm account showed a surplus of just £500 for the combined 14 year period.

Kingdom intended to 'take a firmer stance against imports'. This was contrasted with reality, when the International Beef Conference later in the year agreed substantially increased beef imports for the first quarter of 1938.¹¹⁵ The need for a 'real' restriction on beef imports was one of seven key points put by a deputation of Farmers' Union members to county MPs which, *inter alia*, complained that the subsidies, which they considered to be one of the few futile efforts of the government, had been more than negated by the rise in cost of production. The decline in the sheep price, which had no subsidy, is hardly surprising against the back-drop of hugely increased imports, as was shown earlier in Figure 5.6 on page 240. The local NFU reported that farmers had lost one-third of their capital in 1938, but if this was on top of the 75 percent that they had lost in 1932, see page 253, both statements look to be exaggerated.¹¹⁶ Even in Wales, not covered by the scope of this thesis, it appears that sheep farming was badly hit throughout the 1930s, with some resorting to dairying to try and stem their reduced earnings.¹¹⁷

As to the price of milk, in 1935 producers were receiving about 12d per gallon after paying 1d for collection and transit risk, 1.3d for a rail charge and 2.5d to the Milk Marketing Board.¹¹⁸ The distributor's margin was an extremely healthy one, of some 11d per gallon, and this was probably the source of the discontent by a number of milk producers, who had demanded a poll as to the scheme's continuance. The Farmers'

¹¹⁵ NRO, ML3826, minutes of meeting of 4 December 1937.

¹¹⁶ NRO, ML 3827, minutes of meeting of 16 July 1938.

¹¹⁷ R. Moore-Colyer, 'Farming in depression: Wales between the wars, 1919-1939', *Agricultural History Review*, 46, 2 (1998), pp. 177-196

¹¹⁸ NRO, ML 3824, minutes of meeting 2 February 1935. S. Baker, *Milk to Market*, p. 90. W. Blyton, *Country Airs* (London, 1935), p. 182. Blyton referred to his own experiences with deductions of about 4d from a gross price of 12½d, taking his net receipt down to 8d. The location of the farm is not reported, but they were probably regional variations.

Union pointed out that, were the scheme to collapse, farmers would be unable to sell their milk, and when it came to the vote, sense prevailed and a majority of over 80 percent voted in favour.¹¹⁹ In September 1935, there was a lengthy wrangle between the Milk Marketing Board and distributors on price, leaving dairymen for a while not knowing whether they could sell their milk. After arbitration, the price was finally fixed at 15.2d per gallon, and remained in place for two years.¹²⁰ Milk for manufacture was, it seems, no better with this some 4d per gallon lower ‘than for many years’ due to ever increasing imports of dairy products from the Dominions. The worsening of the milk situation was confirmed by the researchers at Cambridge in a report on the progress of 220 East Anglian farms between 1933 and 1935 which showed that, while milk production had increased by 11 percent, prices had dropped by five percent.¹²¹ On the subject of dairying, Street referred specifically to Northamptonshire, Leicestershire and Rutland and the clay pasturelands of Bicester, where he saw farmers being ‘forced’ to go in for milk production.¹²² How much of a choice was involved is not known, but it is clear from Spratton, Northamptonshire, that there was an amount of dairying which is not seen today. The Hammond family had a dairy, and Teddy Wykes’ milk float is shown in Figure 5.14 in 1935. His was a mixed farm as shown by his threshing operation from the same era in Figure 5.15.¹²³

¹¹⁹ SRO, D 4995/1/6, minutes of meeting of 23 July 1935. *CL*, 78, 2014 (24 August 1935), p. 185. NRO, ML 3824, minutes of meeting 7 September 1935.

¹²⁰ NRO, ML 3824, minutes of meeting 18 September 1935. *CL*, 78, 2019 (28 September 1935), p. 314. Baker, *Milk to Market*, p. 90.

¹²¹ *CL*, 79, 2057 (20 June 1936), p. 640.

¹²² A. Street, *Farming England* (London, 1937), p. 61.

¹²³ Pers. comm. Ray Hammond, (2009) and as published in Heaton, *A Farming History of Spratton*, pp. 38-9. E Jarvis *et al*, *Spratton; A Village History* (Spratton, 2005), p. 53. Archive records of Spratton Local History Society, held by the author.

Figure 5.14: *Teddy Wykes' milk float in Spratton in 1935*¹²⁴

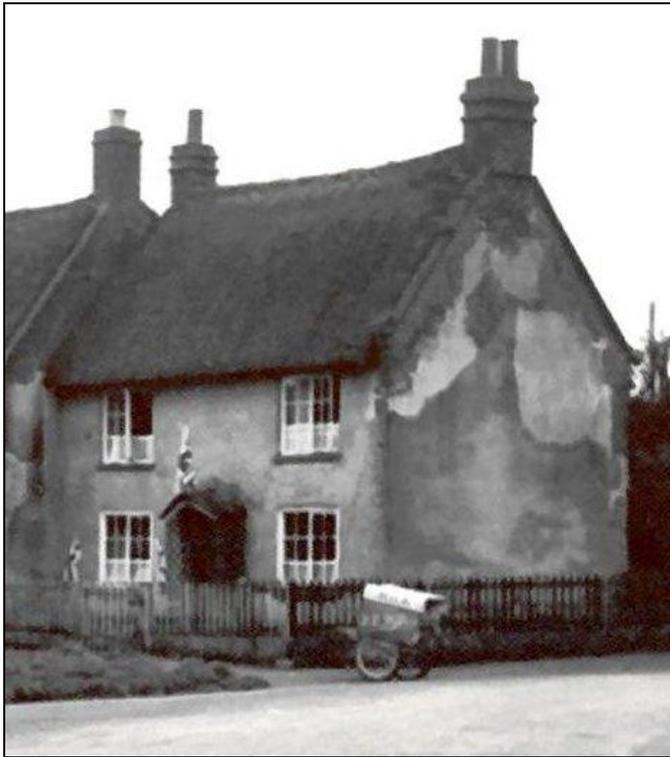


Figure 5.15: *Teddy Wykes threshing in the 1930s*



¹²⁴ This is an extract from the complete archive image. In the remainder of the photograph, bunting for the 1935 Silver Jubilee can be seen across the street.

There is other evidence of the move into milk from Leicestershire. In Husbands Bosworth, Leicestershire, the last field sown to arable was in 1933, and from 1934-1939 all of the parish used for grazing and haymaking.¹²⁵ Also at Bloomhills Farm in Dunton Bassett, Leicestershire, there were, in 1939, only 11 acres out of 1300 acres then in arable production, this for growing barley for cattle feed.¹²⁶ Furthermore of the 28 or so farmers and graziers in the parish, 25 were in the milk business.

As the 1930s drew to a close, and with the threat of war in the air, government ministers were being pressed on their plans for agriculture in the event of a conflict. At the NFU annual dinner in January 1938, William Morrison, then the Minister of Agriculture, was adamant that the ‘conscriptio[n]’ of agriculture, dictating which pastures would have to be ploughed up and what farming operations were to take place, was not to be contemplated, a position with which *Country Life’s* leader writer agreed.¹²⁷ Instead, government intended to rely on its minimalistic intervention, and ‘policy’ of encouraging improvements in fertility and yields, turning its back on Stapledon’s proposals to bring waste land in cultivation. This was despite figures which showed that the country was in a position to feed 1.7m fewer people than in the Great War, while the population had increased by 4.7m.¹²⁸ Lloyd George challenged Neville Chamberlain’s endorsement of this policy, which the latter had set out in a speech at Boughton House on 2 July 1938. The planks of Chamberlain’s argument were that to grow all our food at home would bankrupt the Empire and foreign countries, which sold to us, with a knock-on effect to

¹²⁵ Husbands Bosworth Historical Society, *Husbands Bosworth 2000 AD* (Husbands Bosworth, 2001), pp. 80 and 82.

¹²⁶ Pers. comm. Wendy Warren, Lutterworth, (29 January 2014).

¹²⁷ *CL*, 83, 2142 (5 February 1938), p. 130.

¹²⁸ *CL*, 83, 2149 (26 March 1938), p. 316.

our own balance of payments with these countries. He considered that we should take such steps if war was declared, but not before and that, in the meantime, agriculture should increase along ‘its own natural lines’, implying the government’s *laissez-faire* approach.¹²⁹ The Northamptonshire branch of the National Farmers’ Union saw no chance of the government’s vague aspirations of increased fertility being achieved with farmers on their knees and with ineffective controls on sheep imports, such that many farmers had lost one-third of their capital. Lloyd George, on the other hand, wanted to go for maximum self-sufficiency immediately, criticised by *Country Life* as an extravagant policy in peacetime.¹³⁰ So despite the threat of war, and as successive administrations had done for the last seventy years with the exception of the second part of the Great War, this government had no stomach for serious intervention in agriculture, leaving it to its own devices with limited subsidies. There were now 50,000 fewer people employed in agriculture since the end of the Great War; a reduction of 152,000 acres under the plough; less home-produced butter and bacon and fewer eggs; landowners impoverished by capital levies; and now even with sheep prices on the slide. Nevertheless, Sir Daniel Hall, director of the Agricultural Research Council, held the perverse view that only the state could bring about the re-conditioning of agricultural land.¹³¹ As this not about to happen, agriculture sleepwalked towards the Second World War. Later in 1938, *Country Life* and probably the NFU realised that a plough-up campaign would be necessary.¹³²

¹²⁹ *CL*, 84, 2165 (16 July 1938), p. 50. NRO, ML 3827, minutes of Northamptonshire Farmers’ Union Livestock Committee, 16 July 1938.

¹³⁰ *CL*, 84, 2165 (16 July 1938), p. 50.

¹³¹ NRO, ML 3827, minutes of meeting of 2 April 1938. The fall in sheep prices between 1937 and 1938 is clearly seen from the Gibbard diaries for these two years. *CL*, 84, 2171 (27 August 1938), p. 138. P. Brassley, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, online at <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/33647> [accessed 17 March 2014].

¹³² *CL*, 84, 2178 (15 October 1938), p. 368. *CL*, 84, 2180 (29 October 1938), p. 417. *CL*, 84, 2181 (5 November 1938), p. 440.

The minutes of the Northamptonshire branch of the Farmers' Union in 1938 imply that agriculture was still in a bad place and suggest that agriculture was lobbying hard for subsidies on nearly all products, a position that Morrison seemed ready to embrace with guaranteed prices and import controls as 1938 came to a close.¹³³

The sentiment about farming was echoed by comments attributed to Knight Frank and Rutley at the start of 1939 under an article headed 'Cheapness of farms'.¹³⁴ They reported that land was selling at a price as low as £12 per acre, inclusive of substantial houses which would have cost more to erect than the entire holding was selling for. They deplored the lack of labour on the land and commented that 'few young people today would look with favour on farming as a career'. As to government policy on subsidies, these seem to have been whole-heartedly embraced with the surprise replacement in January 1939 of Morrison as Minister of Agriculture, by Sir Reginald Dorman-Smith, ex-president of the NFU.¹³⁵ The extension of subsidies to barley and oats was not long in coming which, together with extension of the livestock subsidy to sheep, was part of the Agricultural Development Bill presented to the House of Commons on 6 June 1939 'to provide for securing farmers against low prices for oats, barley and fat sheep, and for securing a market for barley, for promoting the ploughing up in 1939 of grass land and rendering it fit for arable crops...'.¹³⁶ The latter was the precursor of the *Dig for Victory*

¹³³ *CL*, 84, 2189 (31 December 1938), p. 645. B.P.P., HC, 20 December 1938, CCCXLII, 2674-5. B.P.P., HC, 22 December 1938, CCCXLII, 3088-9.

¹³⁴ *CL*, 85, 2191 (14 January 1939), p. 52.

¹³⁵ *CL*, 85, 2194 (4 February 1939), p. 106.

¹³⁶ B.P.P., HC, 6 June 1939, CCCXLVIII, 215. The second reading was passed on 15 June, see B.P.P., HC, 15 June 1939, CCCXLVIII, 1555-1671 and the Bill's thrust was threefold to regulate the supplies of imports from overseas; to provide price insurance; and to encourage efficiency measures.

campaign, and the use of Women's Land Armies was already foreseen.¹³⁷ So, farmers had finally achieved across-the-board subsidies on all their main products. With wheat selling at 18/5½d per quarter at the Liverpool Exchange in July, it had plumbed to its lowest price since 1592.¹³⁸ The editor of *Country Life* was now very sanguine about the 'modest outlay' in subsidy which had helped to increase the country's wheat acreage from 1.197m acres in 1931 to 1.83m acres in 1938.¹³⁹ The onset of war was to change everything within a few months.

Contemporary farming research and commentary in the period 1935-1939

Another perspective comes from Lord Addison, brought up on a family farm and Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture 1929-1931, who had published *A Policy of British Agriculture* in 1939. He had shared the gloomy view of A. G. Street using the latter's *Farming England*, published in 1937, as one of his key authorities of the state of farming in the mid to late 1930s.¹⁴⁰ Unlike many of Street's fictional books, this was based on a fact-finding tour of rural England, where he found 'the deplorable state of a large acreage of farming Britain to-day is enough to make one weep – land understocked, weeds flourishing, fences and hedges in disrepair, ditches and drains neglected, and everywhere a woeful lack of fertility, production and employment'.¹⁴¹ Even in the seemingly prosperous hunting areas, with Leicestershire singled out, Street was immediately conscious that all was far from well, and that the losses suffered by the

¹³⁷ B.P.P., HC, 26 May 1939, CCCXLVII, 2680.

¹³⁸ *CL*, 86, 2218 (22 July 1939), p. 54.

¹³⁹ NRO, ML 3828, minutes of meeting of 4 February 1939 report the amount of wheat subsidy as having been £3.5m in the previous cereal year.

¹⁴⁰ Addison, *A Policy for British Agriculture*, pp. 55-6.

¹⁴¹ Street, *Farming England*, pp. v, 8.

beef and hunting counties over the 1930s to date were so severe to be self-evident from the state of the land.¹⁴² Then he had referred to possible exceptions of simple cattle fattening operations, buying in at the start of the season and selling in the autumn, such as the two farms in Long Buckby in Northamptonshire, examined later on pages 291-294. These grazier farmers were, apparently, still managing to hunt three days a week. By the 1930s, hunting had a very different social structure and had moved away from its traditional base. The hunting fraternity were now more likely to be the new landowning class rather than the small traditional farmer. Street quoted a farmer who had lost £40,000 from his beef operations during the past five years, but had been proud to observe that there was not a strand of wire on his land to be a danger to hunting. Such a farmer could only have been from the *nouveaux riches*.¹⁴³

Street concluded that the future for agriculture seemed a little brighter; albeit against a backdrop of farmers being worse off at the beginning of 1937 than they were at the beginning of 1936.¹⁴⁴ The glimmer of hope, however, was not due to the government's agricultural policy, but rather in spite of it. Street was clearly disenchanted and reflected sadly that the only real motive for keeping agriculture alive as 'a cheap playground during peace', appeared to be so that it could be geared up to save the nation at the time of war. Howkins may have been right that the position was not universally black, but the gloomy views of Street and Addison seem to be closer to the mark, these supported by

¹⁴² Street, *Farming England*, pp. 58-59.

¹⁴³ Street, *Farming England*, p. 60.

¹⁴⁴ Street, *Farming England*, pp. 64, 113-4.

another farm-worker turned author, Hugh Barrett, who makes a fleeting reference to farming being in a bad way in 1935.¹⁴⁵

Christopher Turnor was referred to earlier on page 261 in the context of a 1929 publication. His was clearly a voice in the wilderness, for he was still trying to stir people to sit up and take notice of the country's agricultural plight in 1939 when his introduction stated 'My one object...is to stir my fellow citizens to a greater sense of the value of our land to themselves, and of how it could play a much larger part in our national economy...First, we must grasp the extent to which our land is under-developed...'¹⁴⁶

Turnor argued that, from even before the Great War, government policy towards development must be to 'promote either industrial or agricultural; it cannot be both'. The consequence of favouring expansion of industry was that, by 1939, the UK's agricultural population had dwindled to seven percent, whereas the next lowest percentage elsewhere in the world was 22 percent. Turnor quoted comparisons with Belgium, Denmark and Germany, noting that their agricultural policies had tended, from the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth century, towards much greater food self-sufficiency, and that even Belgium manufactured more per head than did the United Kingdom as well as having a vastly greater agricultural output per acre.¹⁴⁷ The importation of vast amounts of food from the last quarter of the nineteenth century, and government's pre-occupation with industry and the towns resulted in a policy away from the development of much greater self-sufficiency in agriculture, and led to almost disinterest in the latter leaving farmers to get on with it as best they could.

¹⁴⁵ Howkins, *Death of Rural England*, pp. 75-6. H. Barrett, *A Good Living* (Ipswich, 2000), p. 2.

¹⁴⁶ Turnor, *Yeoman Calling*, p. 11.

¹⁴⁷ Turnor, *Yeoman Calling*, pp. 13-20.

Turnor's campaign was supported by Sir George Stapledon, another radical through his involvement with grassland. In 1935, by then the director of the Grassland Improvement Station, he published an all-encompassing work on farming, and noted that much of the so-called permanent pasture could not much be differentiated, as a result of neglect, from rough grazing.¹⁴⁸ In reviewing the reasons, Stapledon saw the lost opportunity of the plough-up campaign at the end of the Great War which 'after much hectic endeavour, led to nothing constructive' with this followed after the war by 'first the boom and madness, then drift and uncertainty'. Following his central theme of the lack of land improvement, Stapledon devoted a chapter to the many causes which prevented improvement.¹⁴⁹ However, his whole approach seemed to be that farming could somehow defy the laws of economics, asserting 'that there is more to the land and farming than...a substantial balance at the bank'.¹⁵⁰ Stapledon reserved particular invective for the unploughed pastures of the counties of Northamptonshire and Leicestershire which were 'deemed to be sacrosanct' such that 'it was accounted almost blasphemous ever to mention such a possibility'. He put this in the context of fox-hunting, noting that intensive permanent grass management would require the fencing of such lands such that this 'sportsman would be driven from the shires'.¹⁵¹ Stapledon's central message was one of frustration about government's *laissez-faire* approach to progressive farming and about farmers themselves particularly, it seems, those in the hunting shires. He gave scant regard to the

¹⁴⁸ Stapledon, *The Land Now and Tomorrow*, pp. 60-1.

¹⁴⁹ Stapledon, *The Land Now and Tomorrow*, pp. 189-193.

¹⁵⁰ Stapledon, *The Land Now and Tomorrow*, p. 127.

¹⁵¹ Stapledon, *The Land Now and Tomorrow*, p. 19.

realities of the problems of the 1920s and early 1930s. It was perhaps reports such as this that were in Clare Griffith's sights when she wrote:¹⁵²

A cohort of academic experts in a new discipline analysing the economics of agriculture wrung their hands over inefficiencies and operational conservatism, while foreign imports, by fair means and foul, undercut British producers, as well as winning consumer loyalties on the grounds of quality and effective marketing. She had no doubt of the unprecedented difficulties which were facing agriculture in the interwar year period with the many new yeomen owners being prevented from enhancing their operations due to the collapse in prices, a rising wage bill and the continuation of the tithe charge. Stapledon's increasingly academic approach to land through his *The Land Now and Tomorrow* was reviewed by *Country Life*, who concluded that he was more concerned about the countryside becoming covered with garden cities and slums.¹⁵³ The National Trust and CPRE have much the same concerns today.

By way of retrospective in 1937, *Country Life* harked back to a series of articles by C. Turnor and F. Prewett, which they had published five years earlier.¹⁵⁴ The three strands of policy which had been thought essential were the introduction of marketing schemes, on which a start had been made; subsidies to encourage increased production, which had been introduced at a low level; and the control of imports, on which nothing had happened. There was criticism too from the Northamptonshire branch of the Farmers' Union.¹⁵⁵ Following a meeting with the Central Landowners' Association, they had lamented the fact that in the Midlands, the largest grazing area of the country, many

¹⁵² C. Griffiths, 'Red tape farm? Visions of socialist agriculture in 1920s and 1930s Britain', in J. Wordie (ed.), *Agriculture and Politics in England, 1815-1939* (Basingstoke, 2000), pp. 200-1.

¹⁵³ *CL*, 78, 2026 (16 November 1935), p. 518.

¹⁵⁴ *CL*, 81, 2096 (20 March 1937), p. 291.

¹⁵⁵ NRO, ML 3826, minutes of meeting of 9 March 1937.

farmers had gone over to milk because of the poor returns on beef. Put into perspective, the wheat and cattle subsidies, each at £5m, equivalent to £300m today, were hardly a significant amount of the government's budget and, as Street had pointed out, were having very little impact on the farming industry at large.¹⁵⁶ So Elliot's supportive position on agriculture over the period 1932-1936 had achieved low-level government subsidies resulting in agricultural returns being slightly less disastrous than they otherwise would have been. By 1934, as was shown in Figure 3.36 on page 87, farming bankruptcies were down to lower levels, so perhaps this had achieved its purpose. A further achievement had been the introduction of marketing schemes for milk, hops, pigs and bacon, which had made a start on rationalising these industries, although these had not been without their critics and problems.¹⁵⁷ The leader writer at *Country Life* alternatively saw state intervention 'by fits and starts' or part of a 'hop, skip and jump' policy.¹⁵⁸ He concluded that government's approach had seemed to be to provide the minimum help to farmers hoping, as appears to have been the case, that they would 'make do and mend'. Typical of this approach was the Agriculture Act 1937, which received royal assent at the end of July and which proposed *inter alia* to increase the amount of wheat that qualified for subsidy from six million to eight million quarters. The debate was not much noteworthy other than for Labour MP Ben Riley holding up the authority of A. G. Street's views on the unnecessary pampering of the wheat grower.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁶ Bank of England calculator.

¹⁵⁷ Cooper, *British Agricultural Policy*, pp. 172-5.

¹⁵⁸ *CL*, 81, 2096 (20 March 1937), p. 291. *CL*, 82, 2122 (18 September 1937), p. 286.

¹⁵⁹ B.P.P., HC, 12 July 1937, CCCXXVI, 927-929.

The last word on the 1930s

A Committee on Land Utilization in Rural Areas was appointed in October 1941, under the chairmanship of Lord Justice Scott. Its creation resulted from an earlier 1937 Royal Commission on the Distribution of the Industrial Population under Sir Montague Barlow.¹⁶⁰ Scott's report provides a number of observations on the state of the agricultural countryside at the end of the 1930s, and these comments harmonise with the views expressed by Street and others that all was not well, 'the outward signs of depression were widespread in agricultural areas before 1939'.¹⁶¹ The number of agricultural workers had fallen by 17 percent between 1931 and 1938. Agricultural incomes at the dawn of the Second World War were lower in relation to urban incomes than they had been in the nineteenth century, and this had been largely responsible for the dilapidated state of farms. Farmers had tried to make ends meet by turning from arable to grass:

Less arable land was to be seen in the landscape, the number of derelict fields, rank with coarse matted grass, thistle, weeds, and brambles, multiplied; ditches became choked and no longer served as effective drains; hedges became overgrown and straggled over the edges of fields; gates and fences fell into disrepair; farm roads were left unmade. Signs of decay were to be seen also in many of the buildings...the landscape of 1938 had, in many districts, assumed a neglected and unkempt appearance.¹⁶²

¹⁶⁰ Nuffield College Social Reconstruction Survey, *Britain's Town and Country Pattern: A Summary of the Barlow, Scott and Uthwatt Reports* (London, 1943), pp. 13-15.

¹⁶¹ Nuffield College, *Britain's Town and Country Pattern*. pp. 86-88.

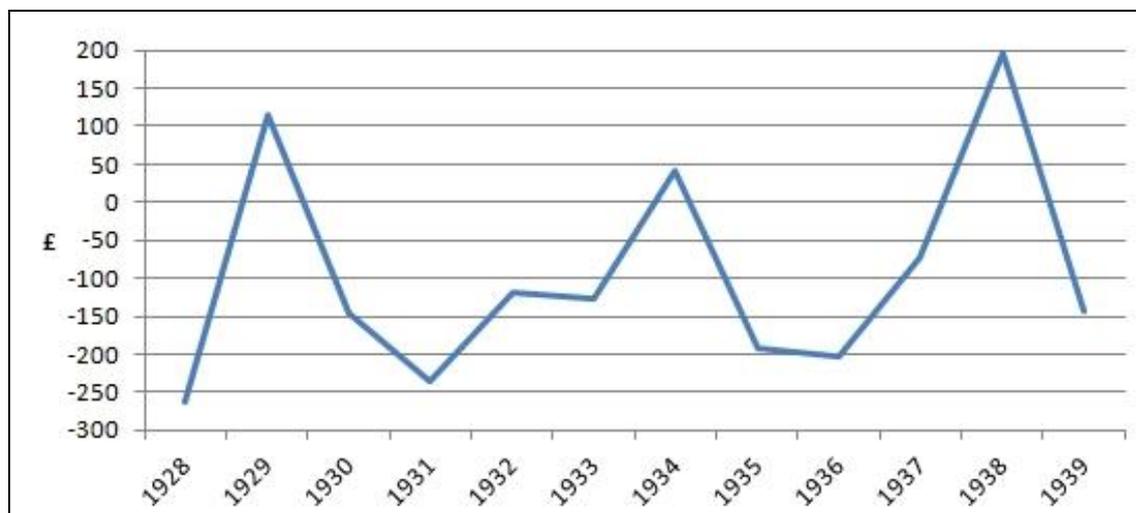
¹⁶² This is a quote from the Scott report, see Stevenson, *British Society*, p. 334.

Evidence from the farms

Crouch Farm, Bloxham Road, Banbury, Oxfordshire

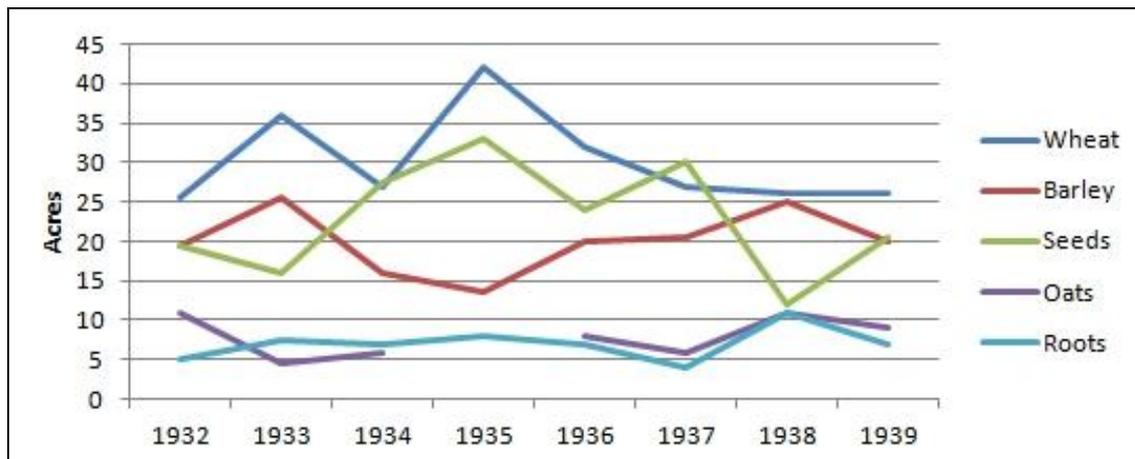
The earlier part of the interwar period was dealt with in some detail on pages 156-166 in Chapter 4. Figure 5.16 shows the position from 1928-1939, when farming was more depressed than the 1920s, with no cash profit other than in an insignificant one in 1934 and some £200 in 1938.

Figure 5.16: *Crouch Farm, cash surpluses, 1928-1939*



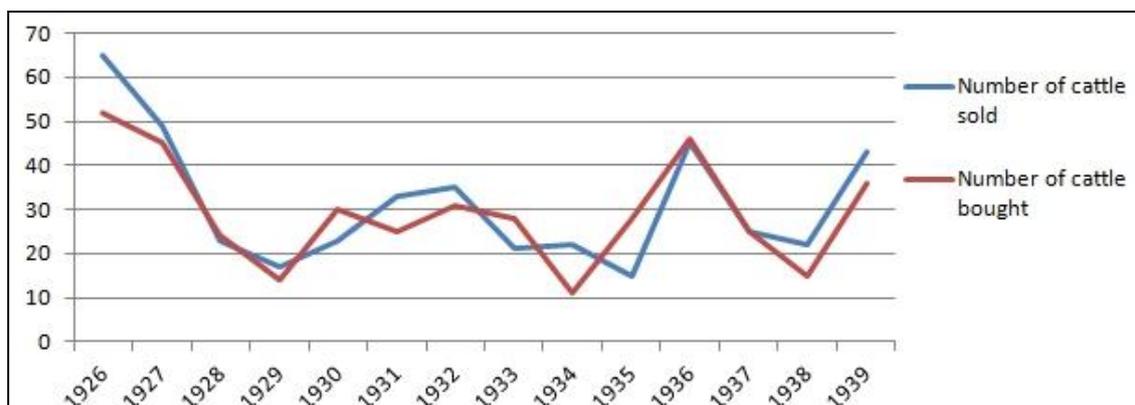
Since Gibbard's accounts do not show year-end stock figures, it is possible that stock adjustments would level out the surge and dip in cash profits in 1938 and 1939. Gibbard maintained his arable acreage at 98 acres, the same as it had been in the 1920s, his crops varying according to his rotations and market price and subsidy expectancy as shown in Figure 5.17.

Figure 5.17: *Crouch Farm, main crops acreages, 1932-1939*



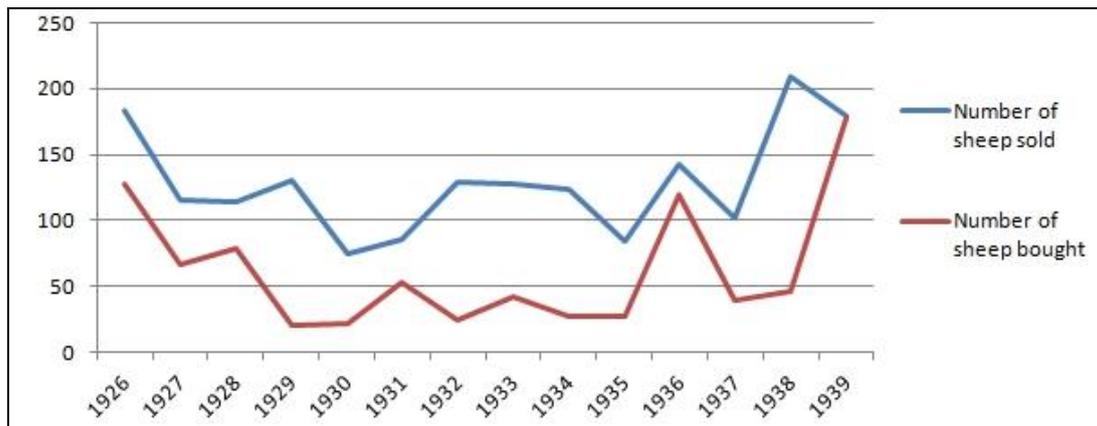
Gibbard increased his wheat acreage with the introduction of the wheat subsidy in 1932, but this tailed off towards the end of the decade. His cattle operation was reduced after 1926 and through the early 1930s, increasing in 1936 as shown in Figure 5.18, possibly as a reaction to the Cattle Industry Act of 1934, and again in 1939 probably in anticipation of war.

Figure 5.18: *Crouch Farm, number of cattle sold and bought, 1926-1939*



His sheep operation was maintained at a steady level, albeit below this activity in the mid 1920s, increasing again at the end of the 1930s, as shown in Figures 5.19.

Figure 5.19: *Crouch Farm, number of sheep sold and bought, 1926-1939*



Figures 5.20 and 5.21 show the price differential between selling and buying prices for cattle and sheep. The selling price for cattle in Figure 5.20 is after accounting for any subsidy.

Figure 5.20: *Crouch Farm, average cattle buying and selling price, 1919-1939*

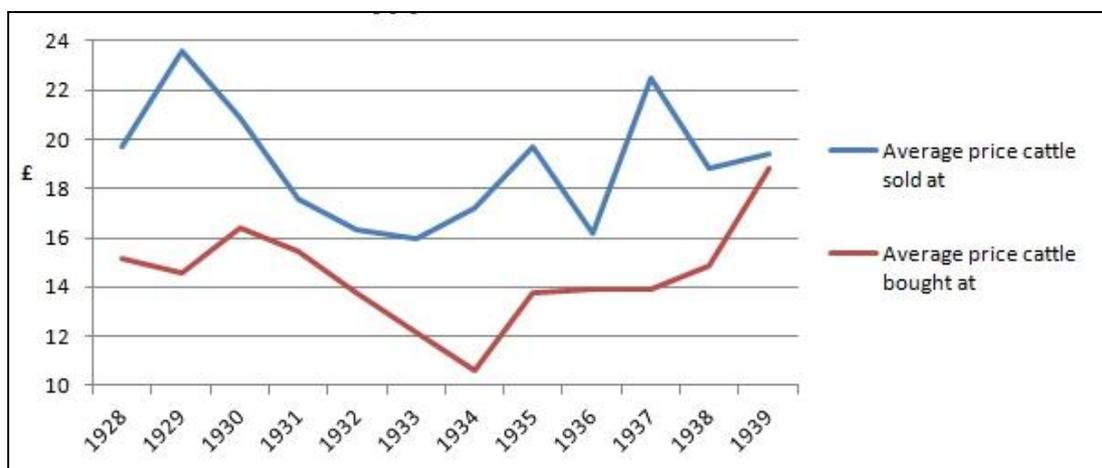
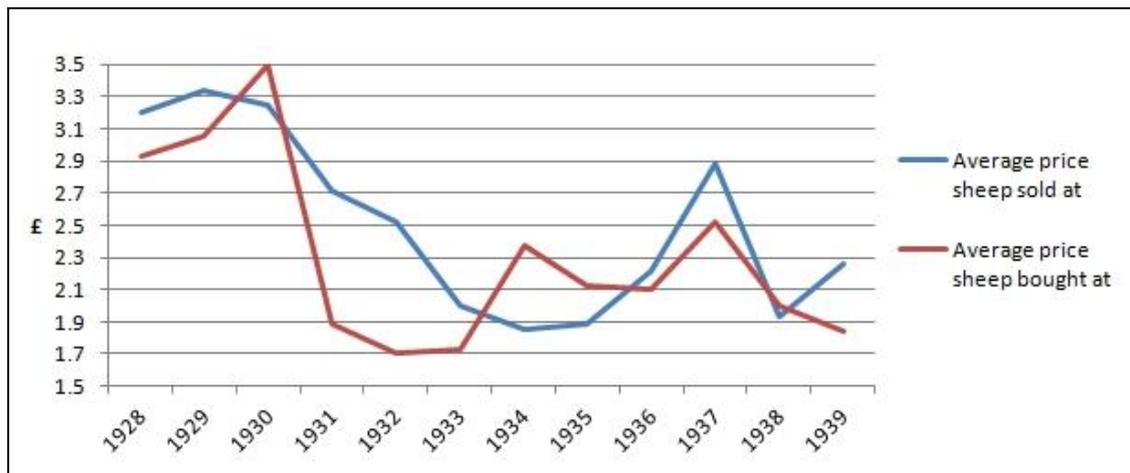


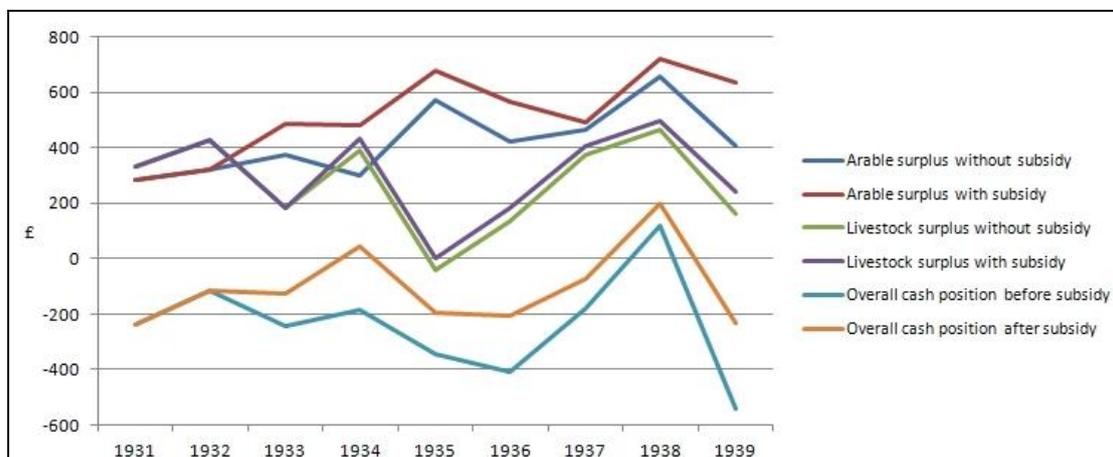
Figure 5.21 demonstrates the lack of profitability in sheep farming in the second half of the 1930s with the selling price apparently dropping below the buying price in 1934 and 1935.

Figure 5.21: *Crouch Farm, average sheep buying and selling price, 1919-1939*



The effect of subsidies is shown in Figure 5.22. In cash terms, these were not of great significance until 1939, and certainly did not ‘save’ the farmer or even help him move from a loss into a profit. This is consistent with the accusations against the government’s policy towards agriculture of tinkering or of ‘too little too late’.

Figure 5.22: *Crouch Farm 1931-1939, showing the impact of wheat and cattle subsidies*



Gibbard maintained his staffing level at three full-time labourers, with added casual men at harvest. The top rate that he paid increased slowly from 1935 onwards as shown in Figure 5.23, while his actual cash wages bill held steady as shown in Figure 5.24.

Figure 5.23: *Crouch Farm, wage rate of 'top' man, 1928-1939*

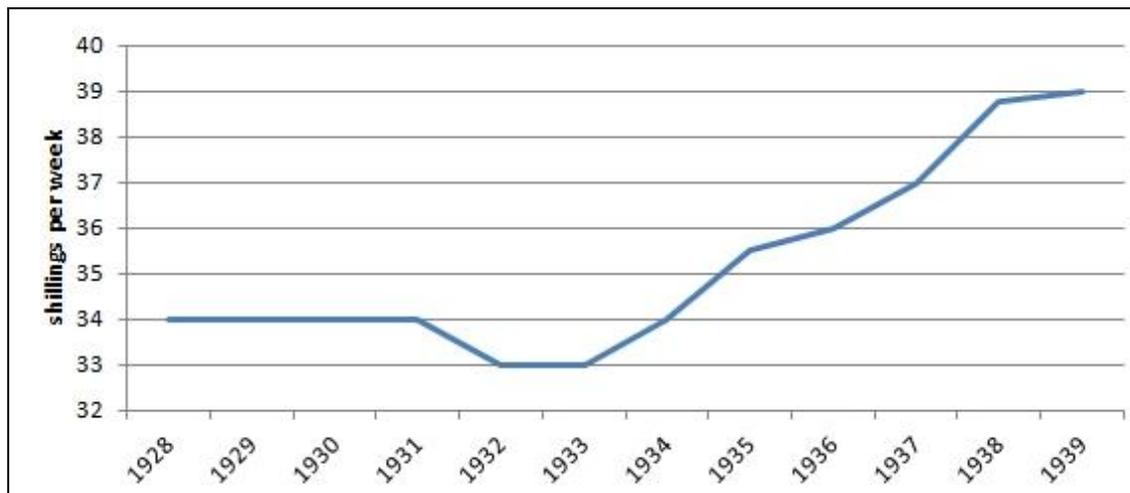
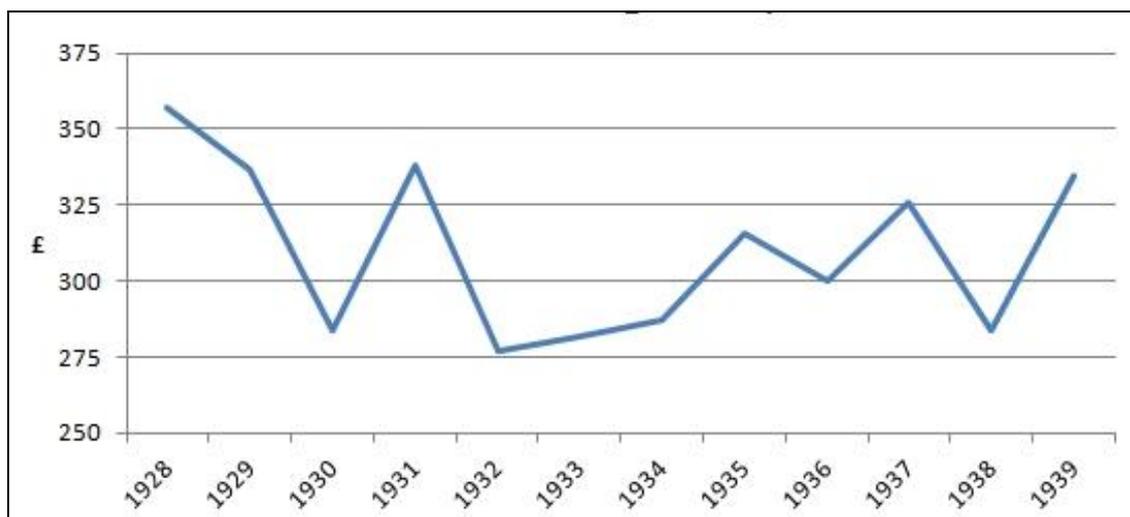


Figure 5.24: *Crouch Farm, annual wage cost, 1928-1939*



Reference was made on page 163 to George Gibbard's loyal and long-term three employees. However, by the mid 1930s, he had become extremely involved in the affairs of the National Farmers' Union, becoming Vice-President in 1937 and National President in 1938. Figure 5.25 is a photograph of him, seated far right, at the NFU War Cabinet

meeting with the Minister of Agriculture, Col. Sir Reginald Dorman-Smith, himself a past president of the NFU.¹⁶³

Figure 5.25: *George Gibbard (extreme right) at the NFU War Cabinet meeting with the Minister of Agriculture*



It is not clear how the farm activities were maintained at earlier levels with Gibbard out of action much of the time and without any significant increase in manpower, but the diaries show that they were. The National Farm Survey carried out in 1943 had only good things to say about the operation (but was critical of the condition of the farmhouse), and also confirms the acreage.¹⁶⁴

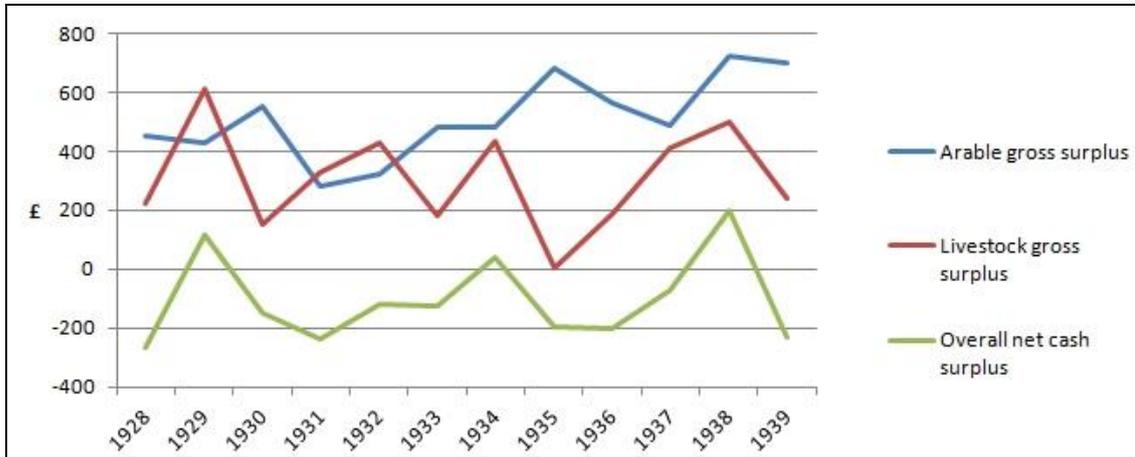
The general impression of the 1930s from both *Country Life* and the local NFU minutes is that it was livestock that determined the fortunes or otherwise of farmers. This is confirmed in Figure 5.26, which shows that the pattern of cash losses in the 1930s is mainly dominated by the gross trading position of livestock activities rather than arable,

¹⁶³ NFU Centenary brochure, 2008.

¹⁶⁴ TNA, MAF 32/908/3.

with the red (livestock surplus) and green (overall surplus) lines on the graph following similar patterns from 1928 onwards.

Figure 5.26: *Crouch Farm, overview of operations, 1928-1939*

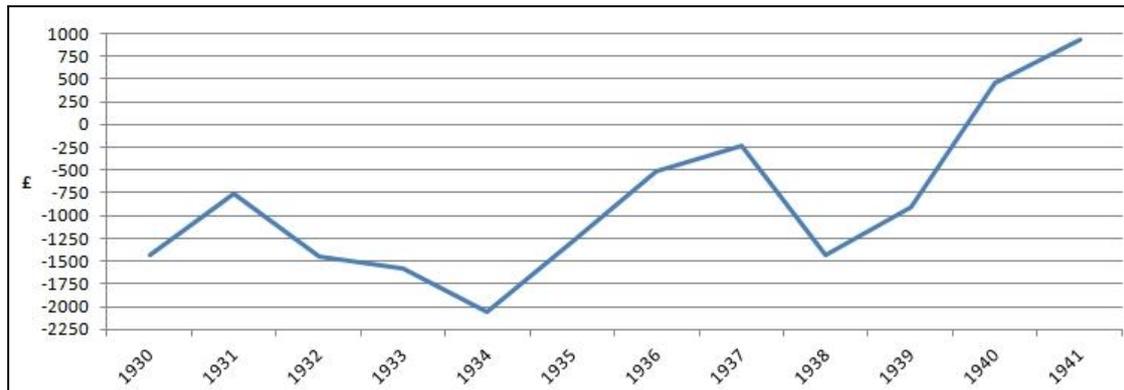


After a one-year recovery blip in 1930 arable turned down as well, taking the business into losses again. The ‘recovery’ of arable via the wheat subsidy in 1932 was not enough to offset the continuing decline of livestock until the very late 1930s. Crouch Farm’s improvement in arable surpluses from 1935 onwards did not work through and add to the overall net cash position. It may be that this was due to Gibbard’s prolonged absences on NFU business.

Boughton House, Northamptonshire

The operation was described in some detail on pages 167-171 in Chapter 4, with the analysis of its component activities and some of its cost covering the entire interwar period. Records of the 4 June returns, which were found from 1932 onwards, suggest that there was no change to the in-hand acreage. The results from Home Farm for the period of the 1930s are shown in Figure 5.27.

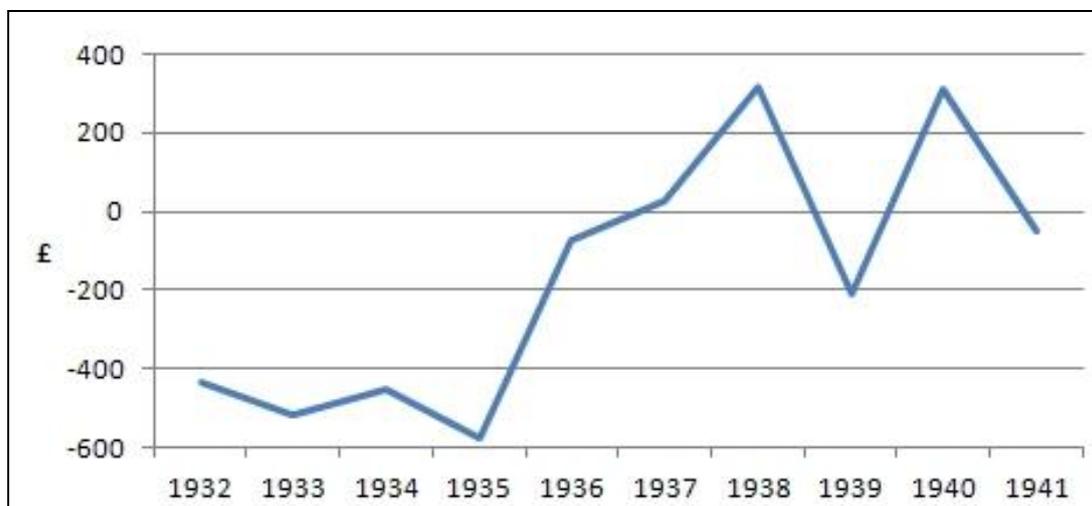
Figure 5.27: Profit at Home Farm, Boughton, 1930-1941



This clearly shows that there was some improvement, albeit from a significant loss-making position, after 1934, although this faltered in 1938. The onset of the Second World War resulted in in-hand farming on this estate moving into profitability, as it had done throughout the Great War.

Another estate farm, Grafton Farm, was taken back in-hand with effect from September Quarter Day 1931, although there is no indication of the reasons for this. Records from this operation are limited but Figure 5.28 shows its profit position for the period 1932-1941.

Figure 5.28: Profit/Loss at Grafton Farm, Boughton Estate, 1932-1941



Until the beginning of the Second World War, or just before, these farms continued to operate at a loss as Home Farm had done in the 1920s, but this was fairly typical of in-hand farming operations on the larger estates.

Another source suggested that the Duke of Buccleuch was able, and indeed preferred, to re-let any vacant farms to tenants from his Scottish Estate, and this was one of the sources of migration of Scottish names into the farming tenantry.¹⁶⁵ However, estate records show only one tenant application came from north of the border in the period 1924-1934, and that in 1932.¹⁶⁶ Indeed there were only five applications for farm tenancies in this period, suggesting that Buccleuch had no difficulty in maintaining his let portfolio, and that, with the exception of Grafton Farm taken back with effect from Michaelmas 1931, there was no need to take other farms in-hand as appears to have happened at Elton Hall, as discussed on page 322.

Cumber farms near Theale, Berkshire

The period of the 1920s was discussed on pages 172-175 in the previous chapter. Unfortunately, the accounts for 1931 are missing as are the full accounts for 1935-1937, but Figure 5.29 clearly shows the downward trend of net assets over the period 1928-1939.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁵ Pers. comm. David Evans, (2 January 2014).

¹⁶⁶ Pers. comm. Crispin Powell, archivist at Boughton House, (7 January 2014).

¹⁶⁷ Pers. comm. William Cumber, Manor Farm, Marcham, Oxon, (7 March 2014).

Figure 5.29: *Net assets of Cumber farms, 1928-1939*

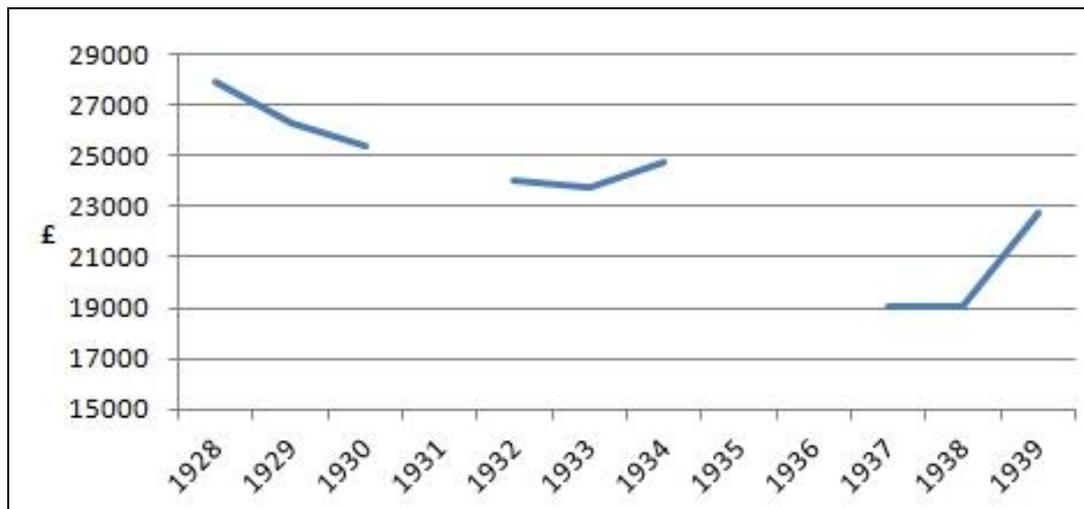
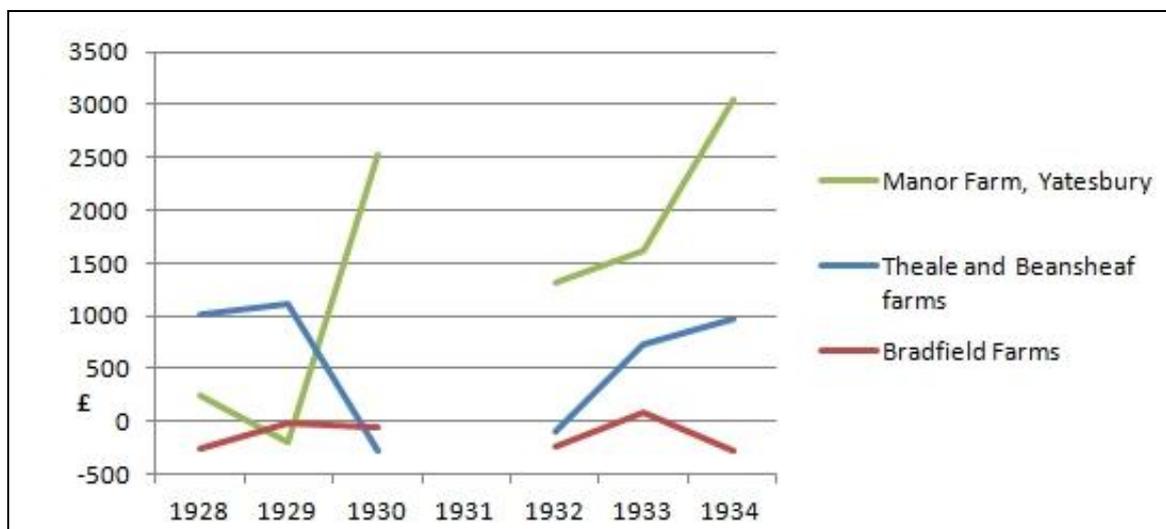


Figure 5.30 shows the profit centres for 1928-1934. It appears that Manor Farm at Yatesbury became the main source of profit.

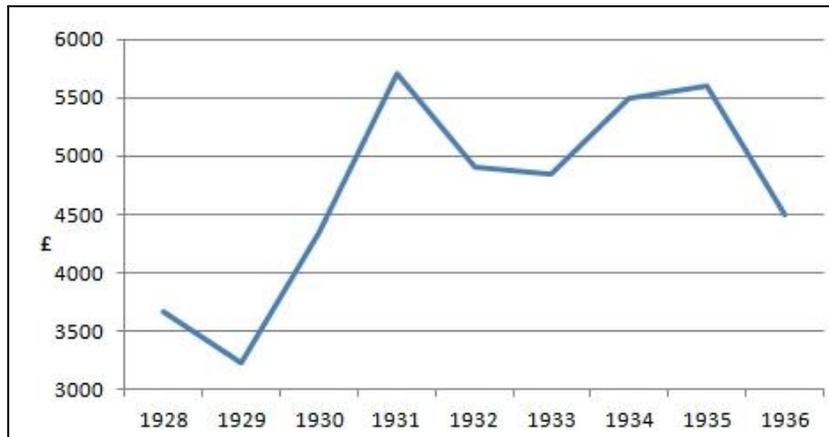
Figure 5.30: *Profit centres of Cumber farms, 1928-1934*



From 1932, there was a change of emphasis with the sale of shire horses being reined in, while the stud element increased from 1931 as shown by Figure 5.31.¹⁶⁸

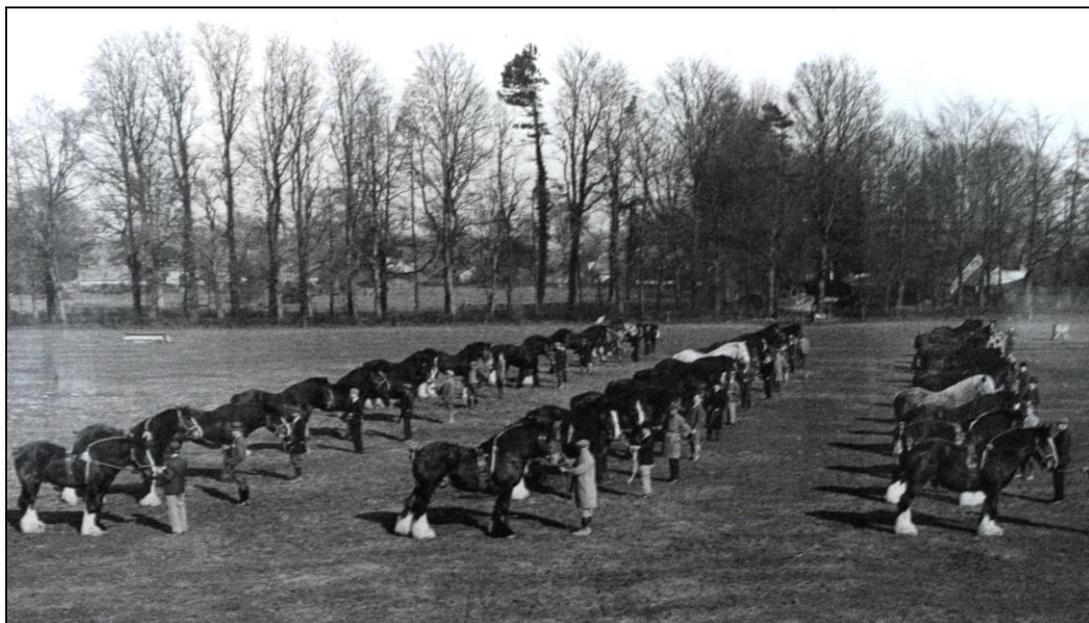
¹⁶⁸ While generally figures for 1931 were missing, there was a separate ledger which recorded the shire horse stud profit and the graph is based on these records which include figures for 1931.

Figure 5.31: *Stud profit of Cumber operations, 1928-1936*



Taken together, these suggest that the stud operation was probably the key to Cumber continuing to make profits through the 1930s. With the gross stud profit running at £5000-6000 each year, wages at Yatesbury some £2000-2300 annually, and no other obvious expenses ascribable to the stud operation, it appeared that this was making some £3000-4000 annually through the difficult years of the mid 1930s. In the breeding season, each stallion was hired out with his groom, as seen in the photograph in Figure 5.32.¹⁶⁹

Figure 5.32: *The shire stallions on Cumber's farm in 1936*



¹⁶⁹ Cumber family records.

The stallion would then visit the brood mares in the area and the fee for the season was typically £400-500, but for a very special stallion it was £1000. Speculatively, this might well have benefited the business by some £20,000 over this period. Given that Cumber's net assets had dropped to £19,000 by 1930, this kept these in the black through the 1930s rather than, potentially, reducing them to zero. According to Pugh, the role of shire horses was only being slowly eroded with 668,000 still working on farms in 1939 due to fields being too small or irregular to benefit from the tractors then operational.¹⁷⁰

Anecdotal evidence from Cumber recalled that, at the start of the depression in the early 1930s, there were 14 or 15 farmers on Berkshire County Council but that, by the start of the Second World War, he was the only one left, the rest having gone bust. W. J. Cumber C.B.E. became president of the Shire Horse Society from 1940 onwards.¹⁷¹ His fame spread and he was reported in the Adelaide Chronicle on 14 May 1927 'Mr W. J. Cumber with his champion mare Wick Lady Clansman, winner of the coveted ribbon at the 48th London Shire Horse Show recently.'¹⁷²

Friars Court, Clanfield, Oxfordshire

On pages 176-178 in the previous chapter, the financial problems of this farming operation were discussed. These were such that by the 1930s, according to the family, the overall business had an overdraft of some £14,000.¹⁷³ Figure 5.33 shows their profits from 1928-1942.

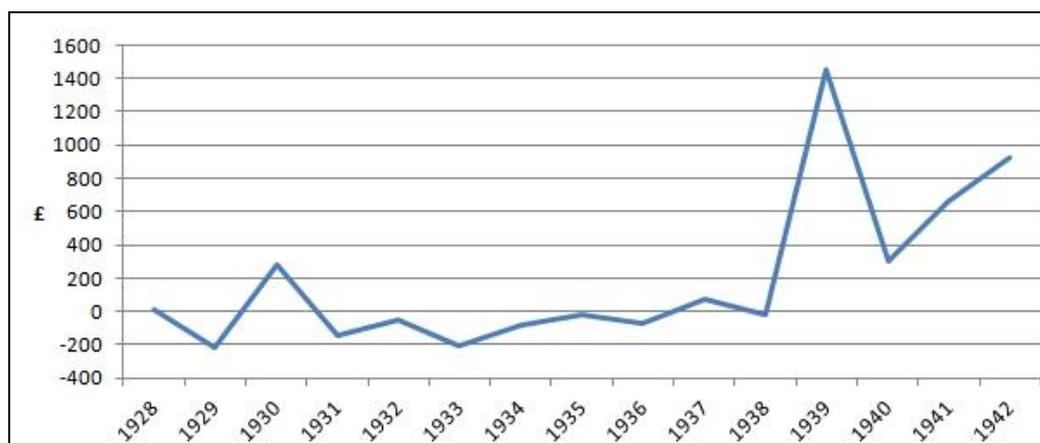
¹⁷⁰ M. Pugh, *We Danced all Night: A Social History of Britain between the Wars*, (London, 2009), p. 261. Brassley, 'Output and technical change', p. 74. There is no reliable data on the number of tractors before 1942, when government started to record this information, with 101,500 that year.

¹⁷¹ <http://www.heavyhorsesonline.co.uk/articles/shire-horse-report-1940-45.html> [accessed 8 March 2014]

¹⁷² <http://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/article/90075555> [accessed 8 March 2014]. The photograph is not of sufficient quality to include.

¹⁷³ Pers. comm. Charles Willmer, Clanfield, Oxon, (22 January 2014).

Figure 5.33: *Farming profits of Willmer family at Friars Court, 1928-1942*



In 1931 the family increased substantially their livestock operation with stock rising from £1669 at the start of the year to £4712 at the end. This increased indebtedness and the bank loan, up from £1350 in 1922 to £6728 in 1933. This probably resulted in the bank deciding to call this in with the farm being put up for sale with a best offer of £10,000. Rather than sell, the family lent the farm £2000 from its business account, and this was supplemented in 1937 and 1938 by loans of a further £3000. Despite everything, the farm survived under the Willmer ownership to the present day. This case-study, of a significantly livestock operation, shows that this was no easier a business to run than a mixed farm. It also demonstrates the forbearance of the lending banks, and the resilience and determination of many farmers. The National Farm Survey, carried out in November 1941, confirmed the farm size at 212 acres.¹⁷⁴

Underwood farms at Long Buckby, Northamptonshire

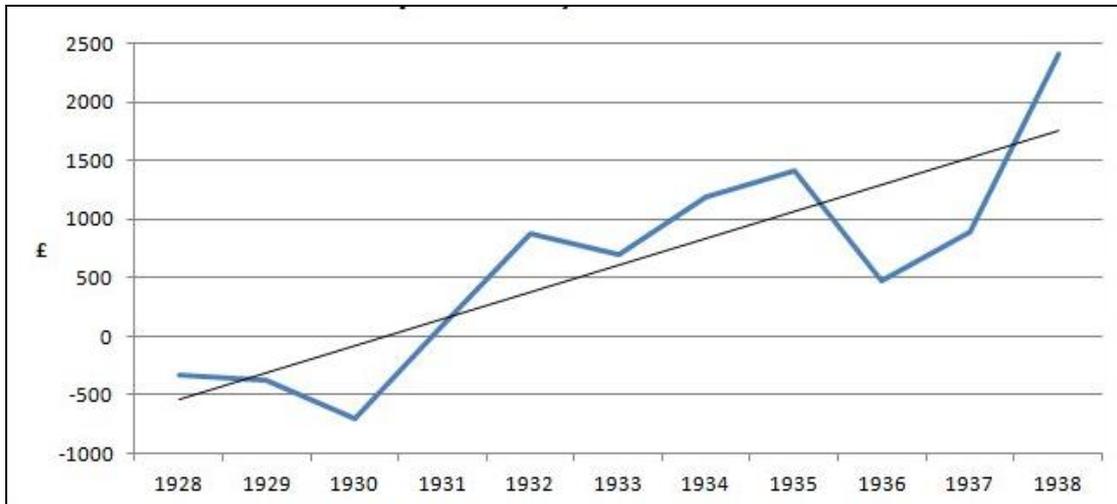
The 1920 period was examined in Chapter 4, pages 178-181, these being cattle fattening operations, rather than mixed farming.¹⁷⁵ By the 1930s, Harry Underwood's son Charles was also farming so both operations can be examined. In both cases, from 1931, there

¹⁷⁴ TNA, MAF 32/911/246.

¹⁷⁵ Pers. comm. Jennifer Thompson, Long Buckby, (9 December 2013).

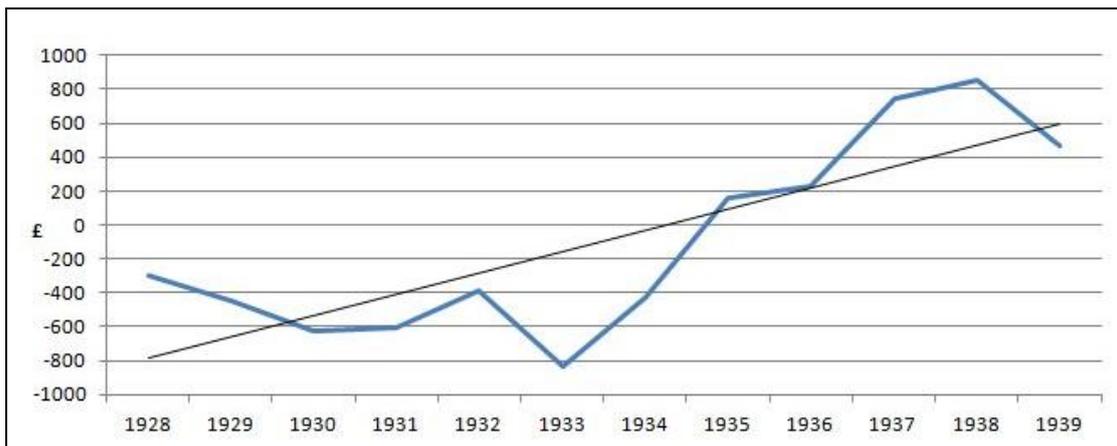
was an improving trend as can be seen in the next two figures. Figure 5.34 shows Harry Underwoods's profits for the period 1928-1938, with a trend line superimposed.

Figure 5.34: *Harry Underwood's farming profits, 1928-1938, with trend line added*



From 1928, a year after his marriage, Charles Underwood's profits were recorded by separate bank books, and these show a similar trend line, as shown in Figure 5.35

Figure 5.35: *Charles Underwood's farming profits, 1928-1938, with trend line added*



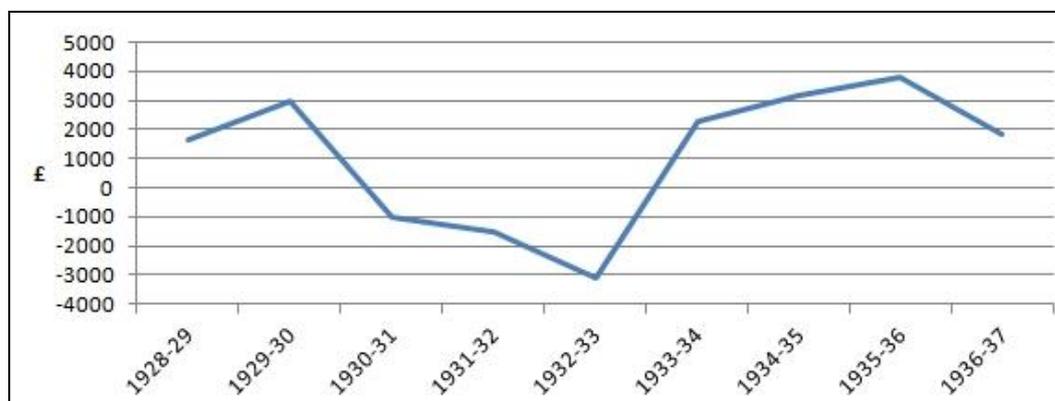
Charles stayed in losses until 1935, whereas his father was making profits from 1931 onwards. This was confirmed by the record of loan transactions between father and son, 1932-1939, and supported by recollections from Charles' daughter that things were

‘tight’ until 1939, when her father had been able to send her elder sister away to a private school. There is no apparent explanation as to why Charles’s profits were lower than those of his father.

Martin farms in the Isle of Ely, Cambridgeshire

The graph of profits for the whole interwar period was shown in Figure 4.47 on page 183. Figure 5.36 shows these trends for the period 1928-1937.¹⁷⁶

Figure 5.36: *Martin farms in the Isle of Ely, 1928-1937*



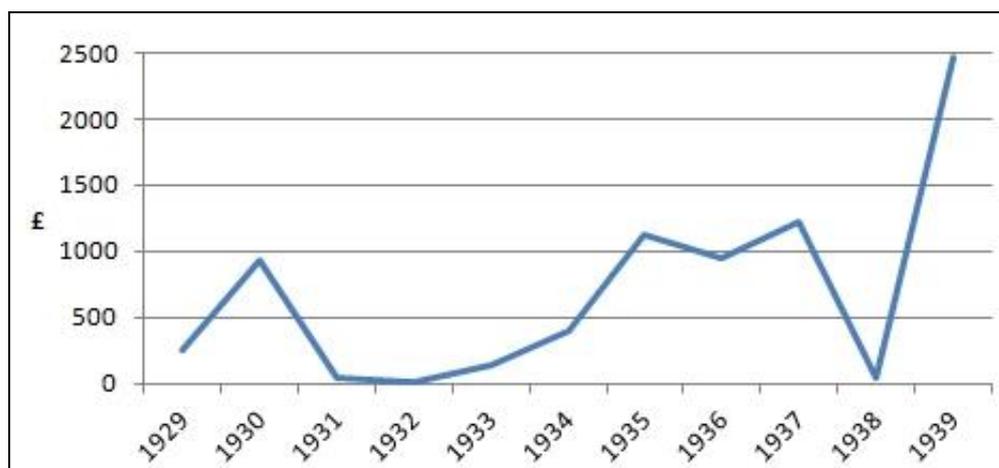
The holding was c. 2000 acres and appears to have been mixed farming. The downturn in the early part of the 1930s was ever present, with more of a recovery from 1933 onwards than most other farming operations studied in this thesis. However, there was not enough information to explain these differences.

Anonymous farm at Long Buckby, Northamptonshire

Another cattle-fattening operation, at a farm near Long Buckby, has already been shown in Figure 4.48 on page 184 for the period 1922-1941.¹⁷⁷ Profits for the period 1929-1939 are shown in Figure 5.37.

¹⁷⁶ MERL CAM 3/1/22 to 3/1/36.

Figure 5.37: *Anonymous farm in Long Buckby, 1929-1939*



There was a drop in profit to zero at the start of the 1930s, consistent with the general malaise at the time. This simplest and least labour intensive method of farming, with no stock held over the winter, remained ‘in the black’ as the 1930s progressed, with an unexplained dip in 1938.

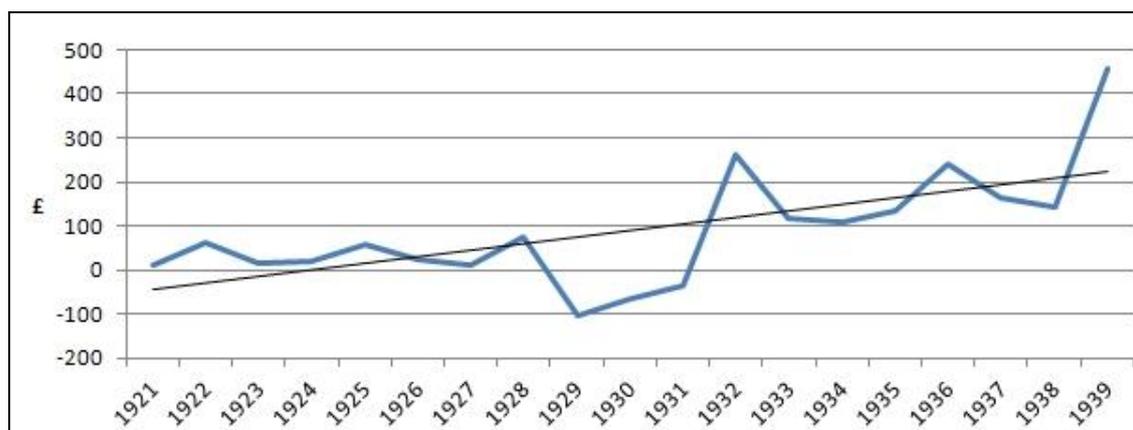
Cotterstock Lodge, Northamptonshire

The earlier period was dealt with in some detail in Chapter 4, pages 184-187. In 1929, John Richardson’s grandfather passed the business over to John’s father, albeit the latter now paid rent to the grandfather.¹⁷⁸ Also, in 1929 the grandfather retired from farming and put live and dead stock up for sale on 25 September, and part of this was acquired by his son as evidenced by an entry on 30 September 1929 of a payment to ‘Richardson’ of £474. To the extent that this represented capital into the business, the apparent profit or loss for that year has been adjusted in Figure 5.38 to reflect this.

¹⁷⁷ Pers. comm. anonymous by his own request.

¹⁷⁸ Pers. comm. John and James Richardson of Townsend Farm, Southwick, (13 March 2013).

Figure 5.38: *Apparent cash profit at Cotterstock Lodge 1921-1939, with trend line added*



There was no need to adjust the rent, as this was payable throughout the period of analysis, even after 1931 when the grandfather died, the property vesting to his widow who lived until 1945. It was also known that in the 1930s, perhaps as a result of this change as well as to ease the difficult financial position, a significant number of laying hens (up to 1000) were kept. Egg prices were high and this was a profitable sideline, so it may account for the upturn from 1932 onwards. Subsequent years show, as is evidenced particularly at Oathill Farm, page 317, that these payments made all the difference to the farmer. There had also been a decrease from seven to five in the staffing levels, and this would have assisted to the extent of some £100 *p.a.*, so contributed to the better trend. In July 1941, with the extra grazing land that had been taken on, there were six workers employed, and the Cotterstock Lodge operation was described as being in good productive condition.¹⁷⁹

Todd family farm at Hardwick, Buckinghamshire

Records for this operation had gaps in the 1920s, so was not analysed in Chapter 4. The farm was in the Vale of Aylesbury, as shown in Figure 5.39.

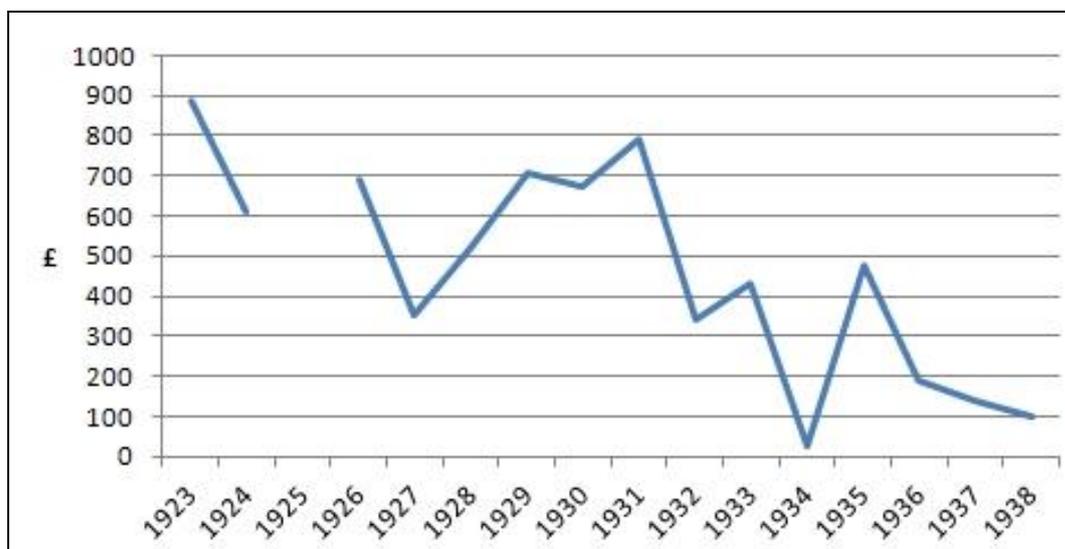
¹⁷⁹ TNA, MAF 32/940/196.

Figure 5.39: *Location of Hardwick in Buckinghamshire*



The soil type in this area is Oxford and Kimmeridge Clays, poorly draining soils which support pasture rather than arable.¹⁸⁰ The record deposit for James Todd's farm described it as The Poplars, Hardwick, but papers included various farms, so it was not clear to which farm these related.¹⁸¹ The farming operation was principally livestock, dairying and sheep, and the profits before drawings are shown in Figure 5.40.

Figure 5.40: *Profit before drawings at James Todd's farm at Hardwick*



¹⁸⁰http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/ourwork/conservation/geodiversity/englands/counties/area_ID3.aspx [accessed 8 January 2013].

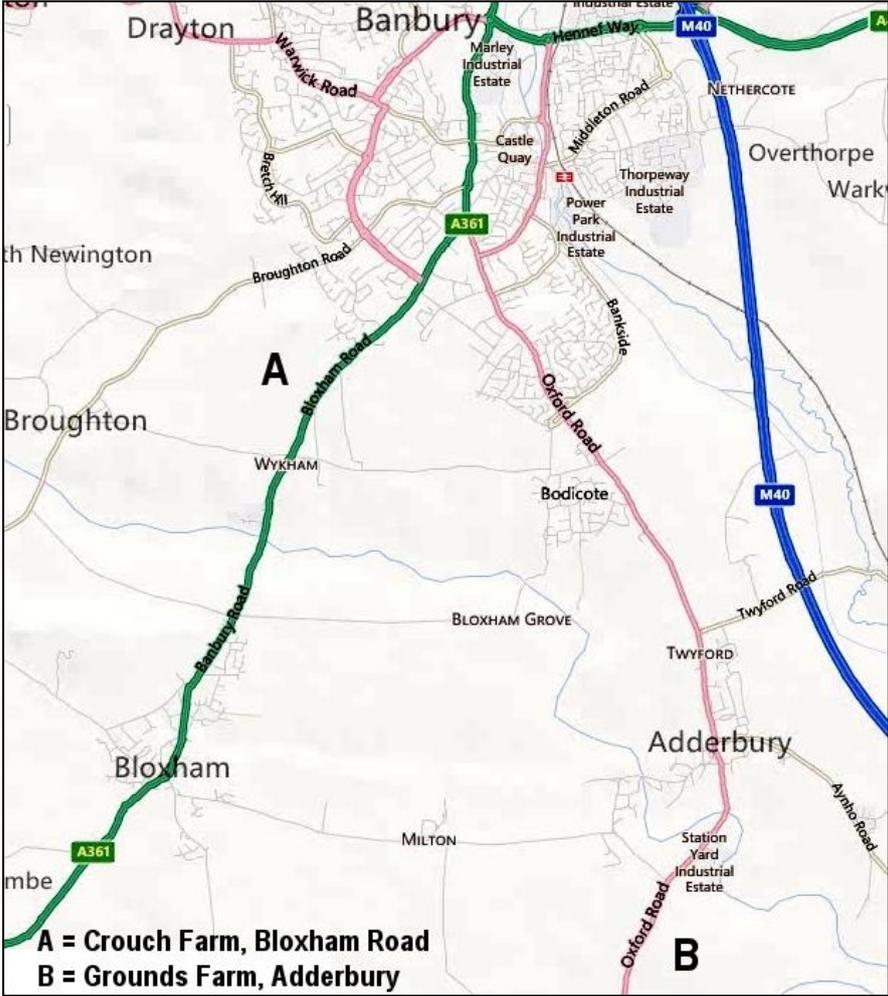
¹⁸¹ <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/a2a/records.aspx?cat=008-todd&cid=-1#-1> [accessed 8 January 2013]. Centre for Buckingham Studies, D 90/18-33.

The progression of the overdraft, from £4521 in 1926 to a peak of £5256 in 1932 then dropping by some £2500 on account of two sales of land in 1936 and 1938 to £2367 at the end of the period, does not show a particular pattern. Figure 5.40 clearly demonstrates a general trend downwards of profitability, suggesting that, while livestock held up in the 1920s compared with arable, this was not the case in the 1930s.

Grounds Farm, Adderbury, Oxfordshire

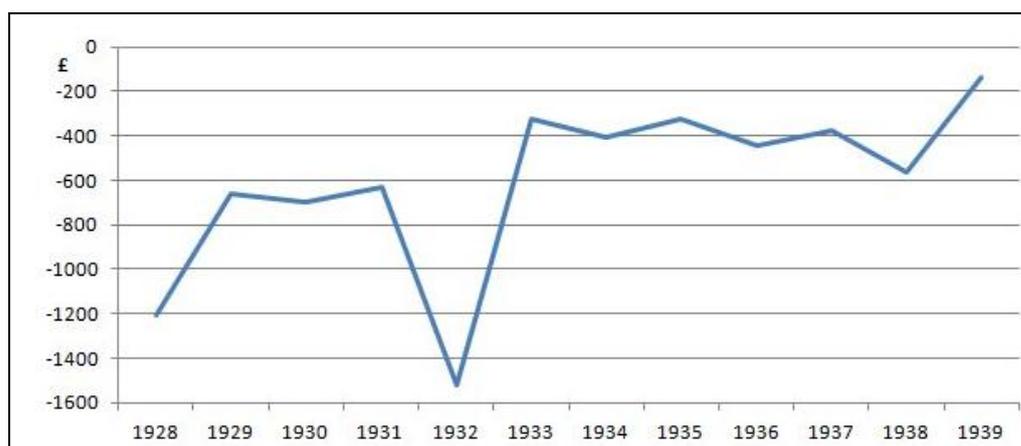
The map in Figure 5.41 shows the close physical relationship between this farm and Crouch Farm, 11 kilometres away.

Figure 5.41: *Locations of Crouch Farm and Grounds Farm, Adderbury*



The Stilgoe family still farm this land, and it was understood that they had farmed it continuously since sometime in the nineteenth century.¹⁸² Accounts for the study period started for the year 1920-1921 (year ending 30 September) and continued to 1924-1925, but there was then a gap for the next two years with accounts starting again for the year 1927-1928.¹⁸³ The earlier years did not provide a long enough period to be useful, so were not included in Chapter 4. The next two Figures suggest that the farming position was better from 1933 onwards, when it stabilised before an uplift in 1939. Figure 5.42 shows the overall cash losses of this operation.

Figure 5.42: *Cash losses from farming operations at Grounds Farm, Adderbury, 1928-1939*



The overall deficit of the operation was probably a result of the very large wage bill of around £1600-1800 *p.a.* Averaged over the entire period of these accounts, wage costs were running at around 50 percent of gross surpluses, much higher than the 30 percent rate of Gibbard at Crouch Farm. If this lower percentage had applied to Stilgoe's

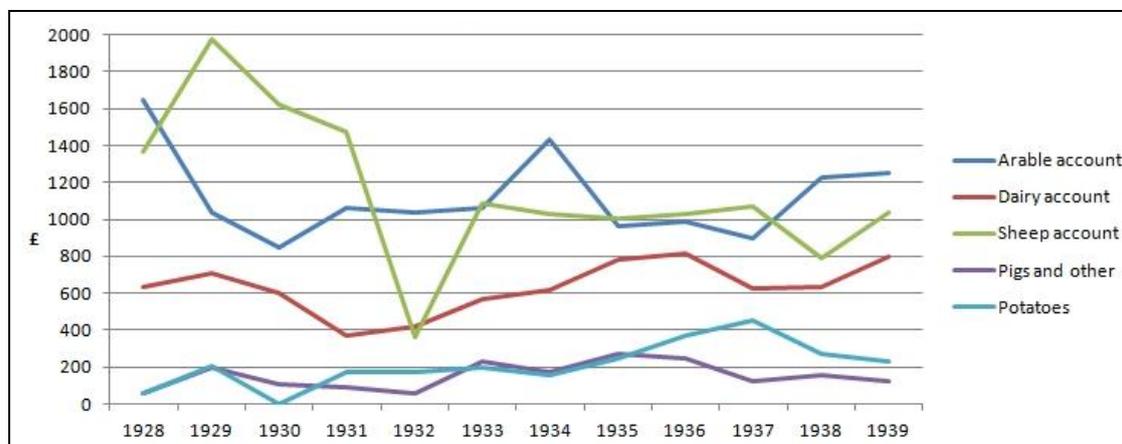
¹⁸² Pers. comm. H. R. N. Stilgoe, (June 2012).

¹⁸³ MERL, FR OXF 19. TNA, 'The Grounds Farm, Adderbury', <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/A2A/records.aspx?cat=007-grounds&cid=-1#-1>, and <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/A2A/records.aspx?cat=007-grounds&cid=2#2> [accessed 20 June 2012]. Records for 1893-1895 and 1920-1946 were deposited at MERL by the Stilgoe family on behalf of Hugh William Stilgoe (1856-1949), sheep breeder.

operation, this would have moved into marginal profitability for the period. It is not suggested that Stilgoe's operation was over-manned as his land may have needed more labour relative to Gibbard's, so land quality may have been at the heart of the profitability or otherwise of mixed farming in periods of downturn. Over the period, the cumulative losses were some £10,000. There is no indication how this was financed, but perhaps this was from profits made in the Great War and the immediate years thereafter.

The large increase in the deficit in 1932 was probably due to a reduction in sheep profits that year shown in Figure 5.43. This drop accords with the much lower sheep price that year as shown in Figure 5.10 on page 242.

Figure 5.43: *Gross surpluses from farming operations at Grounds Farm, Adderbury, 1928-1939*



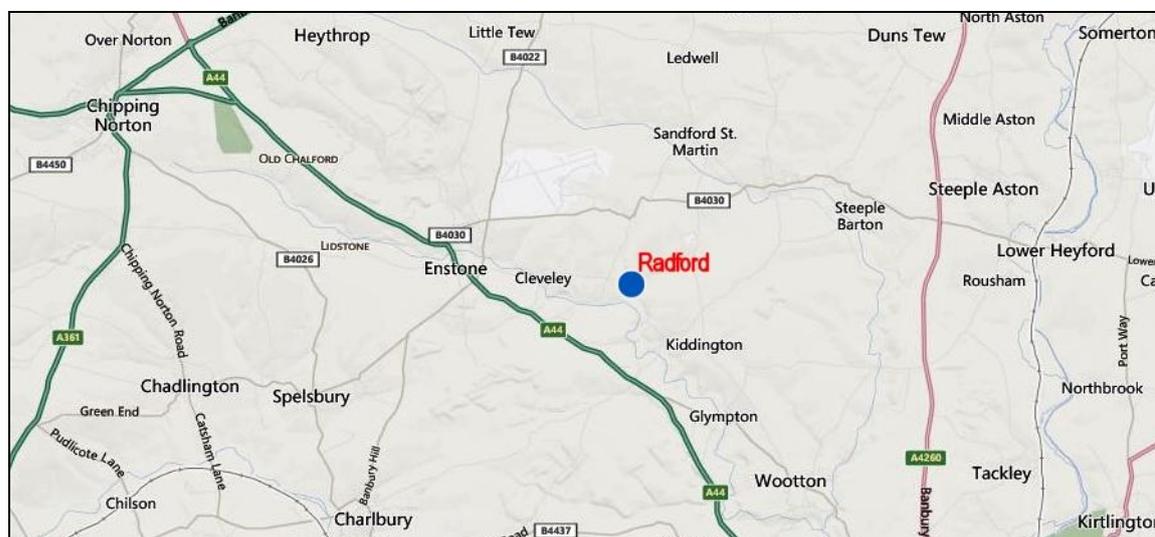
While Stilgoe was referred to as a sheep breeder, it is clear from the Figure that he was also running a dairy herd, and that he had extensive arable operations as well, with sidelines of pigs and potatoes. This is confirmed by the National Farm Survey carried out in March 1943, which shows the holding to be 398 acres, with c. 200 acres of arable, 521

sheep, a small milking herd of 27 cows, and 20 pigs.¹⁸⁴ This survey did not, in this instance, include any general comments about his farming prowess.

Radford Farm, Oxfordshire

Radford is a hamlet on the River Glyme in Enstone civil parish, and is about six miles east of Chipping Norton, as shown in Figure 5.44.

Figure 5.44: *Location of Radford, Oxfordshire*



The Parsons family bought this 500-acre mixed farm in 1812.¹⁸⁵ Between the wars it was staffed by six men, which suggests a relatively low arable element alongside the cattle, sheep and pigs. The cash book did not cover the earlier period of the 1920s and ran from September 1929 to the 1950s. It did not record wages, and may just be a record of payments and receipts through the bank. However, as the wages would have been paid in cash, then there would have had to be corresponding cash receipts. Based on the wages paid at Crouch Farm, the wages bill would have been around £550-600 each year. The recorded receipts seem on the low side for an operation from a 500-acre farm, so the

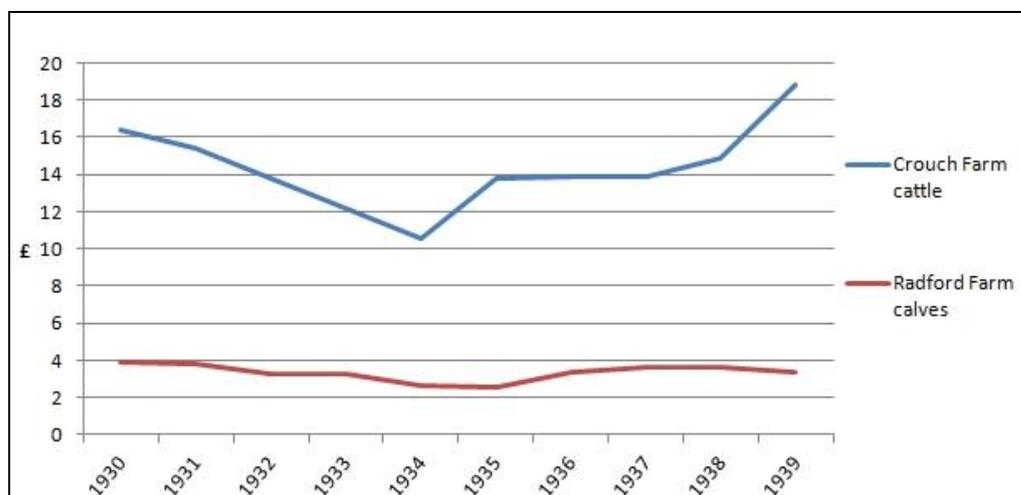
¹⁸⁴ TNA, MAF 32/920/264.

¹⁸⁵ Pers. comm. Robert Parsons, Radford.

addition of this level of additional cash receipts would bring the receipts to a level closer to what might be expected.

The farming operation was, in several ways, different from other operations studied. In the first place, the cattle were bought as very young calves, and then fattened for sale. The average buying price at Radford Farm over the ten years studied was some £3 6s 0d per head, while the per-head buying price of the more mature cattle bought at Crouch Farm was some £14 14s 0d, as shown in Figure 5.45. With between thirteen and fourteen head being bought each year, this gave Radford Farm a competitive advantage of around £150 annually.

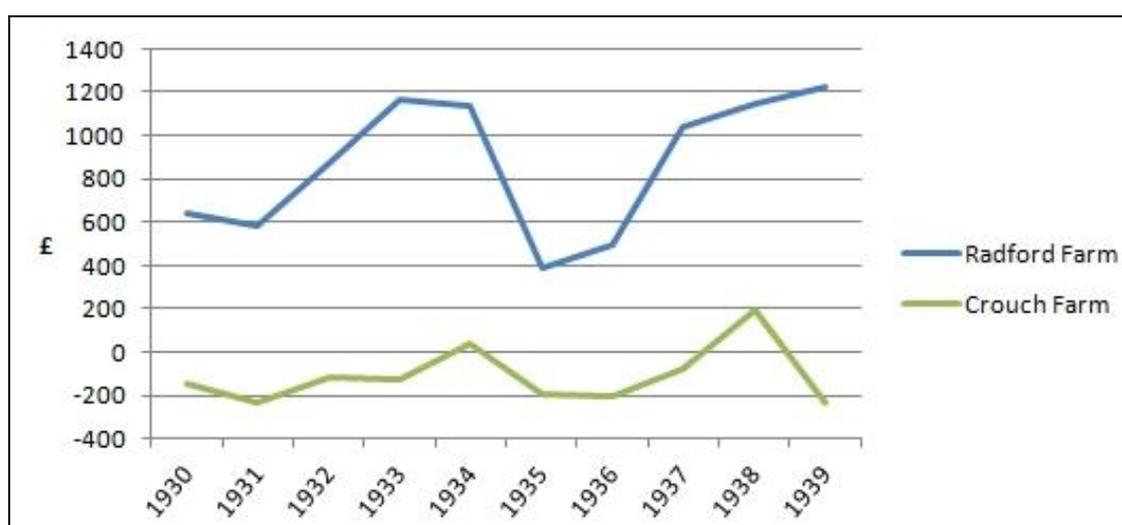
Figure 5.45: *Comparison of unit buying price of cattle between Radford Farm and Crouch Farm, 1930-1939*



It was not possible to compare the selling prices between the two operations as the sales at Radford Farm were often of an unspecified number of cattle and often mixed with sales of sheep and pigs. However, the figures that were available show pluses and minuses of the per-head price compared with Crouch Farm, and there is no reason why the sale price should, on average, have been different between the two operations.

A second difference related to the sheep operation. At Radford Farm, one or two ram lambs were bought every year but, with one exception in October 1934 when 30 sheep were bought, no other stock was bought. This means that, substantially, all the sheep stock at Radford Farm was bred while at Crouch Farm, a farm of one-third the size, some £100 was expended on sheep stock each year. If the flock size at Radford Farm had been three times that at Crouch Farm in line with the acreage difference (but this cannot be ascertained), this would have given the sheep operation at Radford Farm a competitive advantage of some £300 per year. So the total annual advantage from this operation having bred its stock was around £500. Some of this may have been offset by higher wages costs. Furthermore, the farm was owned, so it did not have to carry the burden of a rent charge, which might be expected to be of the order of £500, based on a rental of £1 per acre.¹⁸⁶ When the two cash profits are compared, in Figure 5.46, the first thing that is apparent is that the trends are similar with the exception of 1939.

Figure 5.46: *Comparison of cash surpluses between Radford Farm and Crouch Farm, 1930-1939*



¹⁸⁶ If a true profitability position was being considered, then the cost of capital should be taken into account, negating this benefit.

This difference in that year can be explained by Crouch Farm having geared up its stock in anticipation of the war, thus reducing significantly its cash position. The difference in the cash surpluses averages about £1000 per year. This is similar to the amount arrived at from the breeding-stock advantage and the advantage from not having to pay rent. Even if the cost of capital were to be taken into account, the operation at Radford Farm would still have been cash profitable. There would probably be other variations from the different scales of the two operations but, nevertheless, these figures bear out the benefits discussed. More to the point, it shows that not all operations were doomed to be loss-making and that with the right formula, which kept stock costs down to a minimum, it was possible to trade in the black in the 1930s.

The farm was surveyed for the National Farm Survey in November 1942.¹⁸⁷ The recorded acreage was unclear but appeared to be 412 acres plus 125 acres of rough grazing, consistent with the information from the family. There was a staff of nine, 72 cattle, 373 sheep, and *c.* 230 acres of arable at the time of the survey. Parsons was described as a ‘very sound, if conservative farmer’.

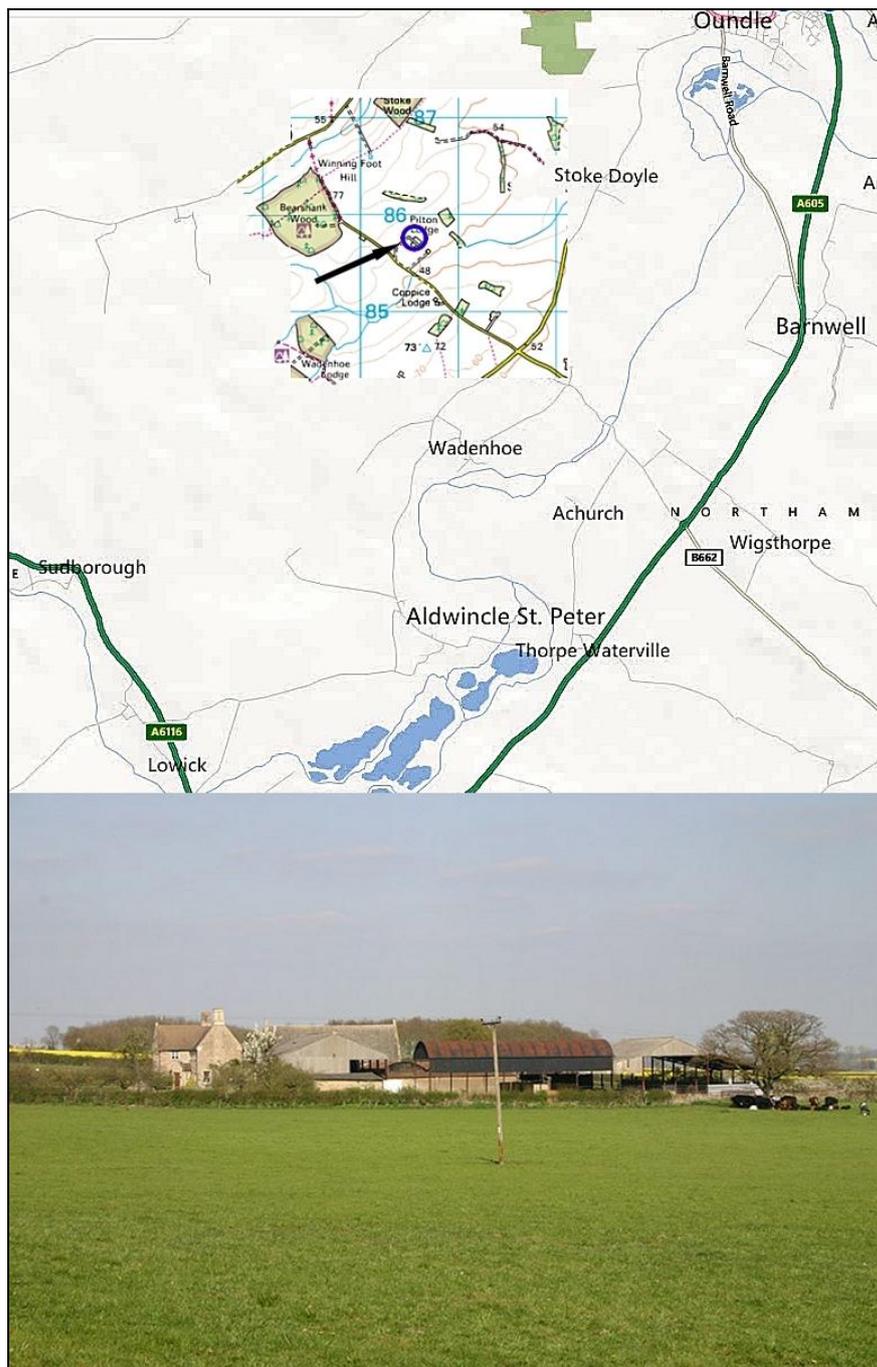
Pilton Lodge Farm, Northamptonshire

This farm did not feature in Chapter 4, as no figures were available for the 1920s. Figure 5.47 shows the location and a photograph of the farm.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁷ TNA, MAF 32/912/84.

¹⁸⁸ The inset on the Bing map and photograph of the farm are acknowledged to Geograph Project, and reproduced under the terms of their common licence, <http://www.geograph.org.uk/photo/397686> [accessed 10 April 2013].

Figures 5.47: Location and photograph of Pilton Lodge Farm



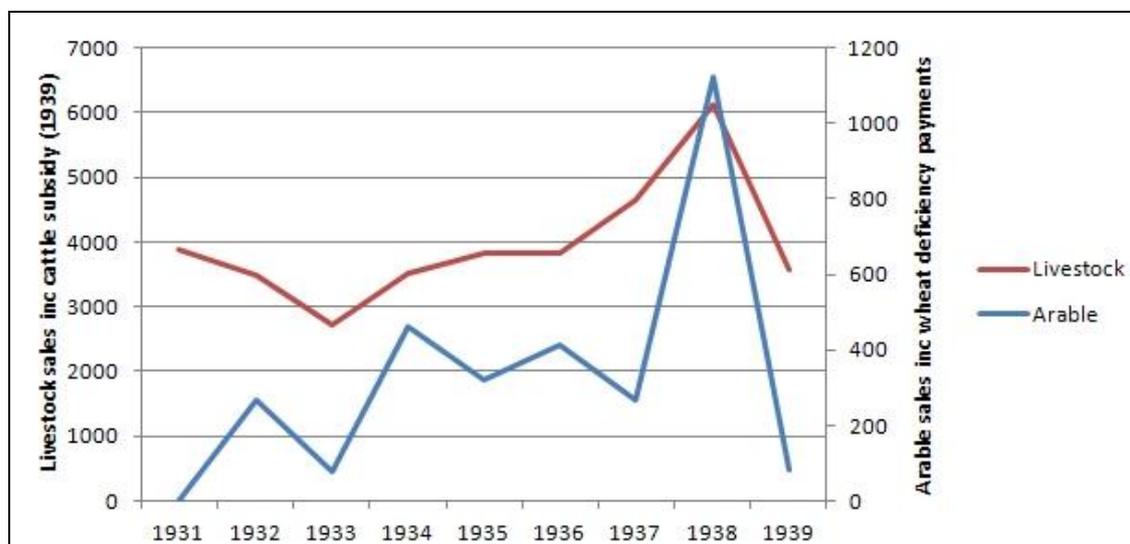
Deposited professionally prepared accounts, referring to Tom Raven of Pilton and Wadenhoe, showed figures for years ending 11 October 1929 and then, after a one-year gap, from 11 October 1931-1939.¹⁸⁹ In 1937, it was recorded that this farm operated from

¹⁸⁹ ROLLR, DE 3663/68/15. These records were previously at the Rutland Record Office, and were deposited by Royce & Co., auctioneers. The single year ending October 1929 is left out of this analysis.

612 acres. The farming operation came to an end, for reasons unknown but maybe retirement, in 1938 when it was recorded that Tom Raven gave up occupation of Pilton Lodge Farm on 11 October that year, retaining just 25 acres at Wadenhoe.¹⁹⁰

The deposit suggested that arable was introduced in 1931 or 1932, prior to the start of the wheat subsidy scheme, so possibly this was due to the slide in livestock prices. The operations, between 1931 and 1939 are represented by Figure 5.48.

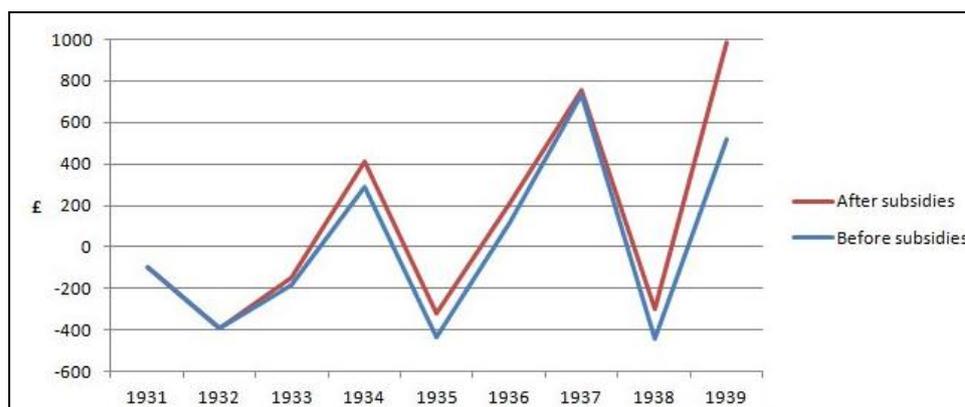
Figure 5.48: *Pilton Lodge Farm livestock and arable sales, 1931-1939*



The profit or loss situation, which is a proper accounting figure after adjustment for stock, is represented by Figure 5.49, which show this before and after the benefit of the wheat and cattle subsidies, the latter only being recorded for 1939.

¹⁹⁰ TNA, MAF 32/948/206. According to the National Farm Survey, carried out in June 1941, the holding was then farmed by F. Knight and was 580 acres which reconciles with Raven having kept 25 acres. Knight had done 'fair work into bringing unproductive grassland in to arable cultivation', and the farm was then carrying a large dairy herd.

Figure 5.49: *Pilton Lodge Farm, profit before and after subsidies, 1931-1939*



The cumulative profit for the nine years from 1931-1939 was £120 before the subsidy payments and £1103 after these payments. No particular reasons for the swings from profit to loss could be found in the figures. The monetary variations are small, compared with a turnover of around £3000 to £4000, so whether a profit or a loss was made was in the balance. As shown also in Figure 5.22, page 282, for Crouch Farm, the effect of subsidies was *de minimus* other than in 1939.

Farming operations of T. J. Kingston, Northamptonshire

The deposit did not give any clues as to the location or size of the farming operation of T. J. Kingston, his wife and another.¹⁹¹ Other research suggested that it might have represented the business of Thomas John Kingston of Home Farm Whittlebury, who died in 1945.¹⁹² The records covered only the period from 1931-1939. They provided the valuation of livestock, and these figures, averaged over the eight years for which there were valuations, suggested that this livestock operation required *c.* 180 acres, as shown in Table 5.2.

¹⁹¹ NRO ZB 904/46-54 (1931-1939).

¹⁹² Pers. comm. Jillian Hedges, (14-16 December 2012).

Table 5.2: *Kingston farming operation, estimate of livestock acreage*

	Average no.	Density, say	Acres
Dairy cows and cattle	140	1 per acre	150
Ewes/lambs	70	5 per acre	15
Pigs	150	10 per acre	15
Total			180

The cumulative loss for the period 1931-1939 was £950. The records did not provide an analysis of sales and thus inform as to whether there may have been arable as well.

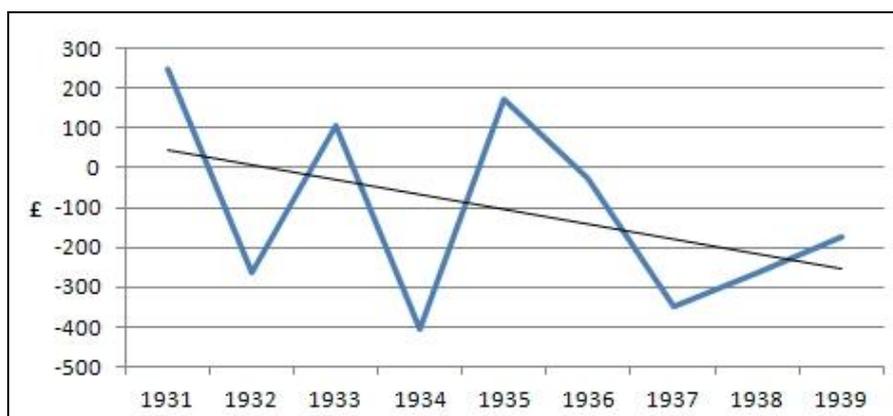
However wages averaged some £600 *p.a.*, twice the level of Crouch Farm which employed three men, so this suggested a payroll of six farm labourers, and that the farm was probably closer to 300 acres (Crouch Farm was 165 acres). Turnover at the Kingston farm rose through the 1930s as shown in Figure 5.50.

Figure 5.50: *Kingston, turnover of farming operations, 1931-1939*



The profit trend of the Kingston operation was downwards as can be seen in Figure 5.51.

Figure 5.51: *Kingston surplus of farming operations, 1931-1939, with trend line added*

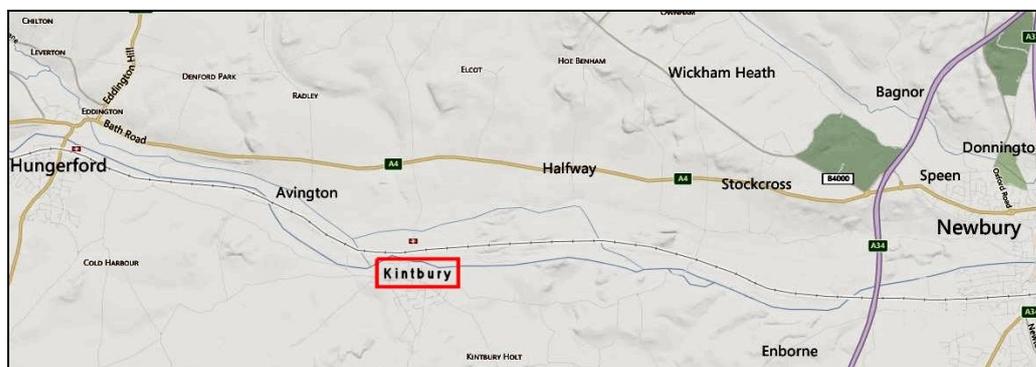


Pilton Lodge Farm, shown earlier in Figure 5.49 on page 306 and about twice the size, had a cumulative loss of £1100 before subsidies over the same period.

Halfway Farm, Kintbury

The location of Kintbury in Berkshire is shown in Figure 5.52.

Figure 5.52: *Location of Kintbury, Berkshire*



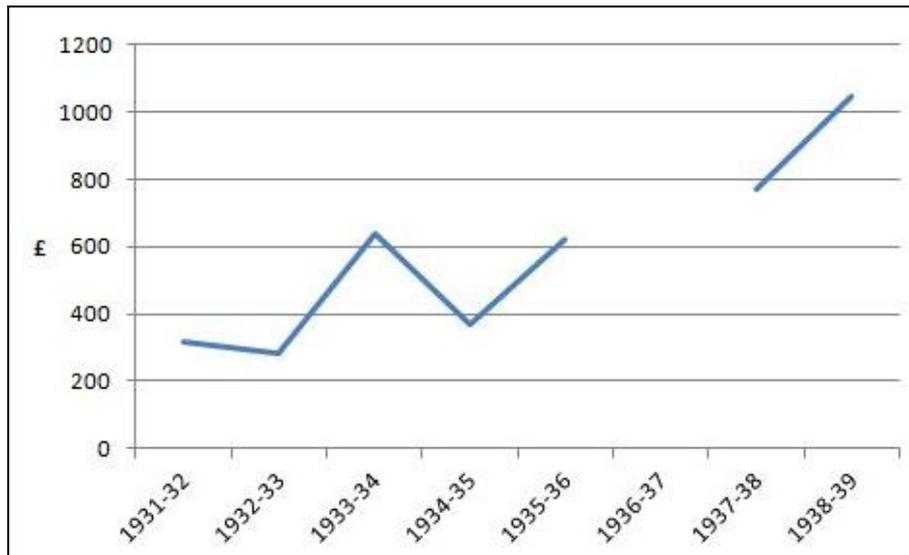
No figures were available for this operation for the earlier period. This was another operation which was largely stock and dairy farming, with just a little arable.¹⁹³ Farm size up to 1936 was 330 acres, after which it was 396 acres.¹⁹⁴ Figure 5.53 shows profit

¹⁹³ MERL BER 14/1/1 to 14/1/11, <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/a2a/records.aspx?cat=007-ber14&cid=-1#-1> [accessed 22-23 October 2013].

¹⁹⁴ No return from the National Farm Survey was found at TNA.

figures from 1934-1939, only those from 1932-1933 to 1934-1935 being able to be adjusted for changes in stock. Figures for 1936-1937 were missing. The graph points to improving profitability in the period of the 1930s for which figures were extant.

Figure 5.53: *Profits at Halfway Farm, Kintbury, Berkshire, 1934-1939*



Manor Farm Shilton, Oxfordshire

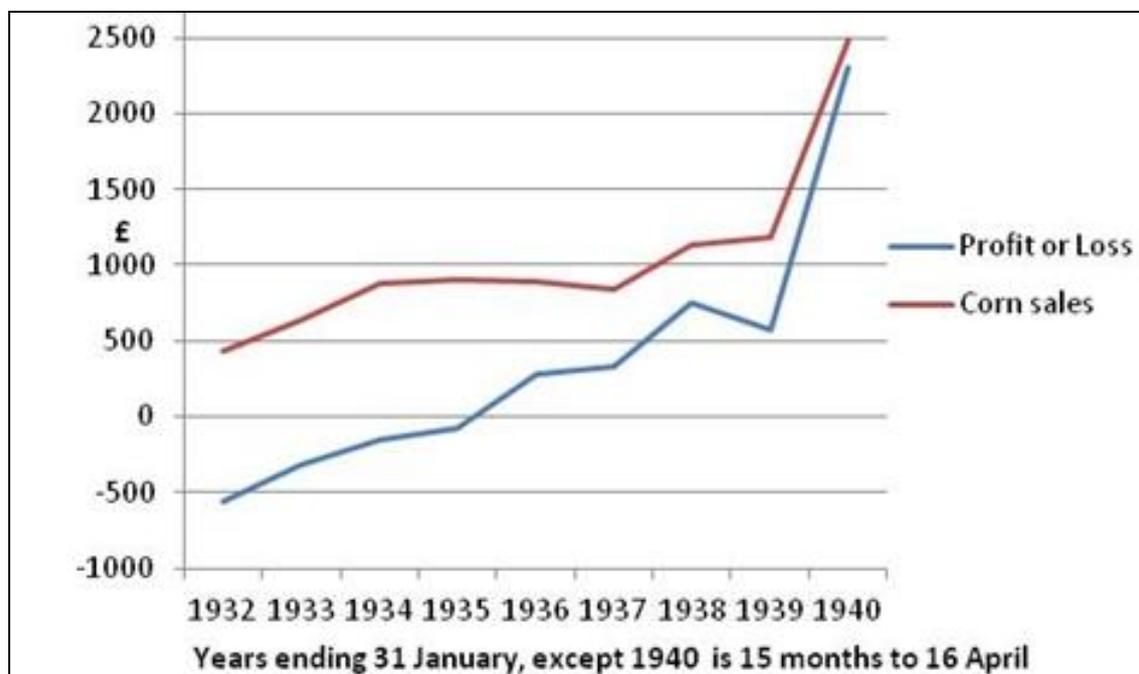
Shilton is south of Burford, as shown in Figure 5.54, and it is almost certainly in the Cotswolds.

Figure 5.54: *Location of Shilton, Oxfordshire*



Manor Farm was rented in 1914, purchased between 1919 and 1930 and sold in 1940, when the deposit donor's family moved to Ashbrook Farm, Blewbury, Berkshire.¹⁹⁵ The farm area was 365 acres. Figures were only available for the period 1932-1940. Based on these, this looks to have been a mixed farming operation, which moved into profit during the year ending 31 January 1936, as shown in Figure 5.55. Increase in profits suggest that the subsidies may have helped here more than in some other farming operation which were studied.

Figure 5.55: *Profits and corn sales at Manor Farm, Shilton, 1932-1940*

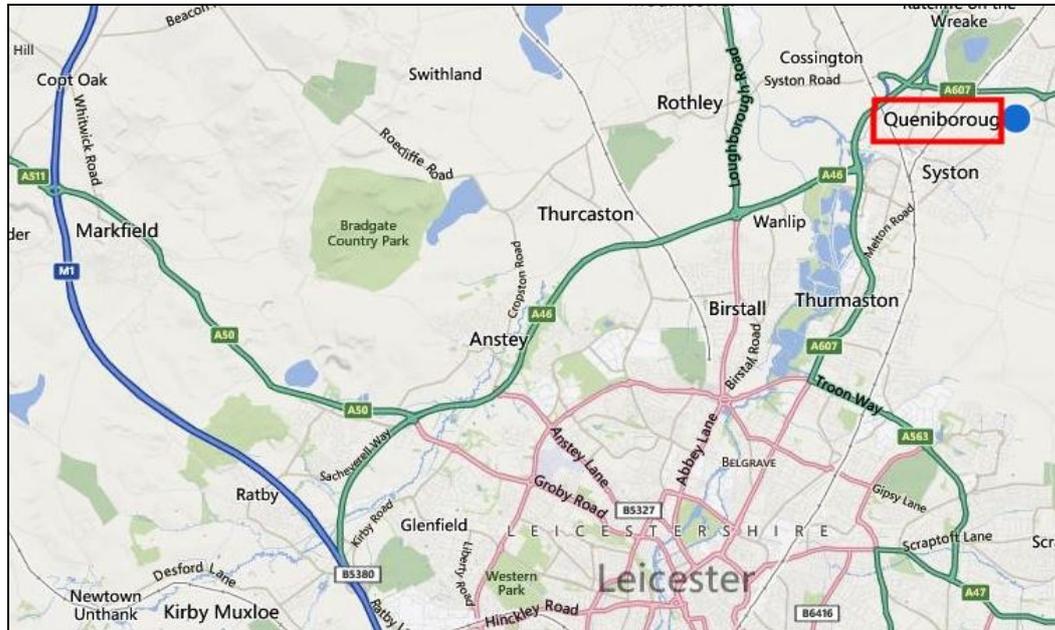


¹⁹⁵ MERL OXF 17. <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/a2a/records.aspx?cat=007-oxf17&cid=0#0> [accessed 31 October 2013]. Deposit by Porter family, assumed to be the farmer.

Queniborough dairy farm, near Leicester

This is to the north-east of the centre of Leicester, as shown in Figure 5.56

Figure 5.56: *Location of Queniborough, near Leicester*

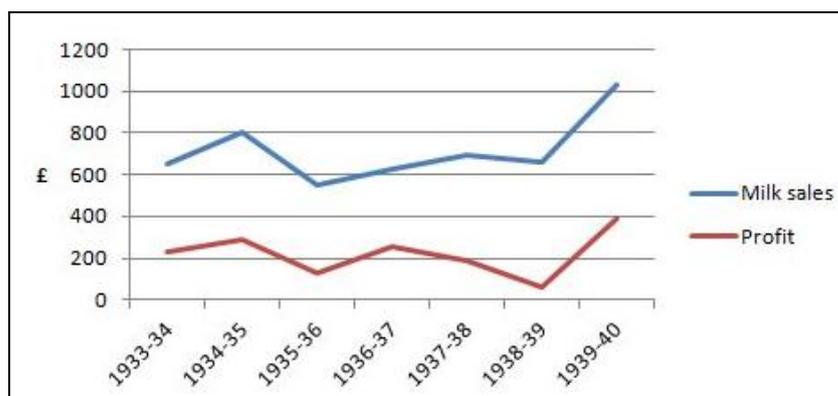


The deposit, by the Mann family, consisted of a farm account book and farm diary for the period 29 August 1933 to 1950, and covered years ending 29 September, and showed this to have been a dairying and poultry operation in this period.¹⁹⁶ The Mann family are still dairy farmers at South Croxton Grange.¹⁹⁷ No information of farm size, in respect of the deposited accounts, was given but the rent was £175 *p.a.* and there was a labour bill of around £130 *p.a.* suggestive of a farm of over 100 acres with a significant family labour element. The rent appeared to have been paid to the mother who died on 14 September 1939. As a substantially dairy operation, Figure 5.57 shows that this was profitable throughout this period and that profits fluctuated with sales.

¹⁹⁶ MERL LEI 5/1/2. <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/a2a/records.aspx?cat=007-lei5&cid=1#-1> [accessed 29 October 2013].

¹⁹⁷ <http://ukplaces.com/dairy-farmers/queniborough/wf-mann-son> [accessed 29 October 2013].

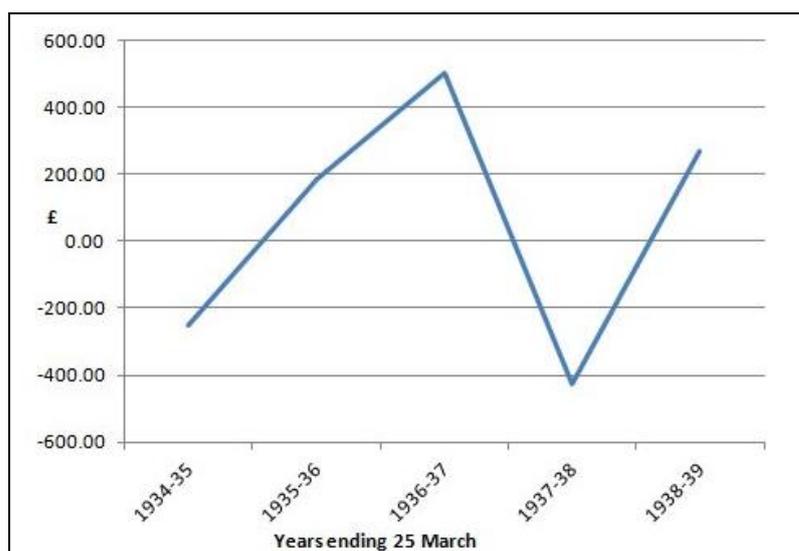
Figure 5.57: *Profits at Queniborough dairy farm near Leicester, 1933-1940*



Farm at Blakesley, Northamptonshire

The period 1921-1929 was covered in Chapter 4, see figure 4.60 on page 197. Records did not start again until 1934.¹⁹⁸ Unfortunately the earlier very comprehensive account keeping had given way to merely recording receipts and payments, so the profit or loss could no longer be ascertained. The difference between receipts and payments is shown in Figure 5.58.

Figure 5.58: *Receipts less payments for a farm at Blakesley, 1934-1939*



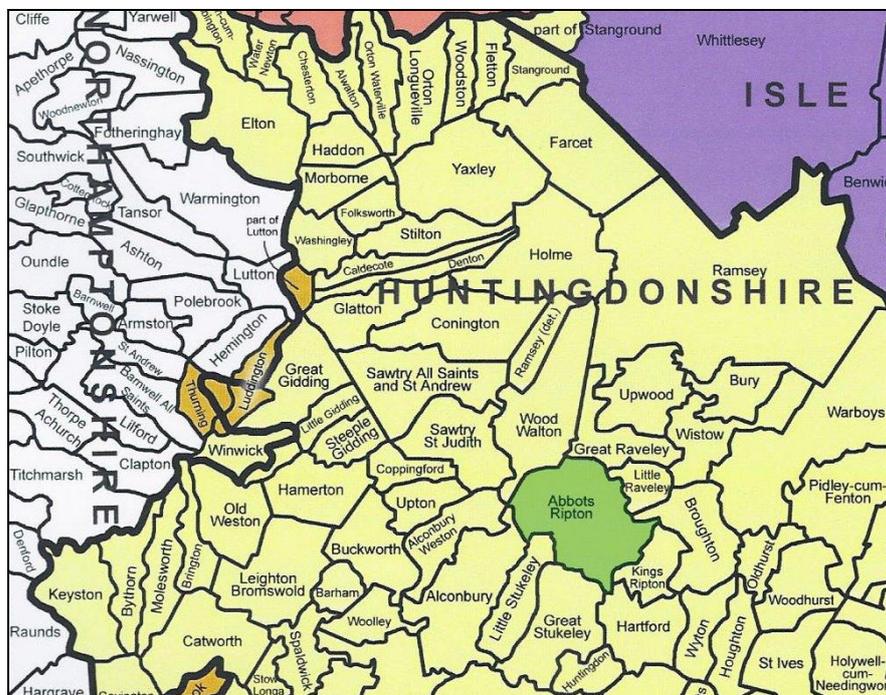
¹⁹⁸ MERL, Northam4. <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/a2a/records.aspx?cat=007-northam4&cid=0#0> [accessed 20 June 2012 and 30 October 2013].

By 1934-1935, the enterprise was much larger, although there was no indication of acreage, and it appeared that the farm had become a more mixed undertaking. Over the five years, there was a surplus of receipts against expenditure of just £283. While the enterprise flourished relatively during the years ending 1935-1937, the position then worsened and with the cost of feed remorselessly rising, this may have triggered the apparent reduction in rented acreage in the last year in this series. Included for completeness, this limited period study is of little benefit to the overall analysis.

Abbots Ripton, Cambridgeshire (previously Huntingdonshire)

The parishes of Abbots Ripton (shaded green) and Ramsey (in the north-east adjacent the Isle of Ely) are shown on Figure 5.59.

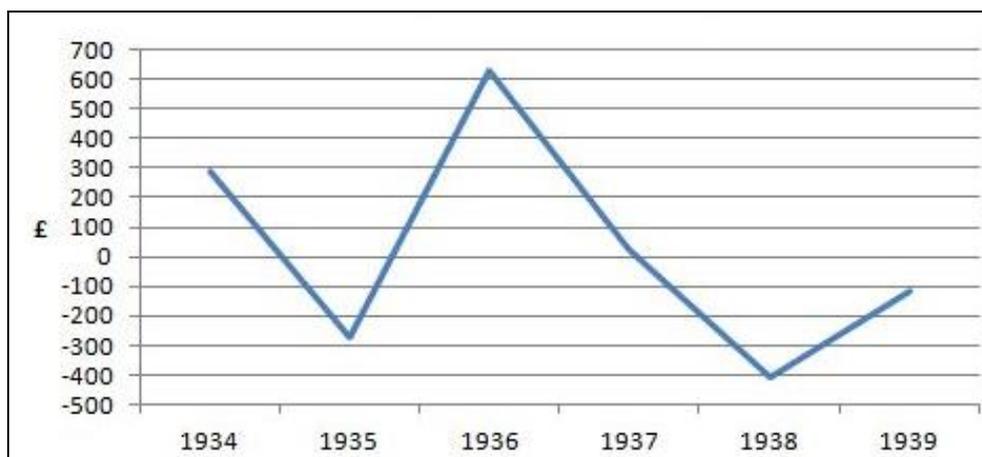
Figure 5.59: Locations of the parishes of Abbots Ripton and Ramsey



The title of Baron de Ramsey was created in 1887 for Edward Fellowes and the current fourth Baron is John Ailwyn Fellowes. The family seat, previously Ramsey Abbey, is

now Abbots Ripton Hall. Extensive records over the last three centuries had been deposited at the Huntingdon Archives, and among these were records of farms in Ramsey and Abbots Ripton.¹⁹⁹ There were no other descriptive details, such as size, of the farms in question with the deposit, and the conclusions are drawn from the figures alone. The account records for the farm in Ramsey started in October 1934, but suggested an established farming operation comprising cattle (probably fattening), arable, pigs, potatoes and roots. The wages bill suggested about a dozen men, later increased by 50 percent with a substantial increase in the potatoes and roots sales. The profit, shown in Figure 5.60, seemed to be reliant on this latter activity with a big increase in sales in 1936 reflected in the one-year increased profit. The downward trend was influenced by the introduction of a rent charge from 1937 (half year only) onwards suggesting that the farm, while in-hand, had to pay its way in rental terms. The full year rent was £680, so a farm of *c.* 500 acres might be speculated.

Figure 5.60: *Cash surplus from farm at Ramsey*



For the farm in Abbots Ripton, there was a one-year account for the year ending October 1929, during which the farming operation appeared to have been rented to a Mr J. C. How with a first instalment of £750 being paid, presumably for stock. Clearly How did

¹⁹⁹ HA, R/2680/3/5-6 and R/2680/4/1-9.

not make a success of this operation as the farm appeared again in the year to October 1933, when it was taken back in-hand, with a payment of £867 being made for, presumably, farm stock. It was apparently also necessary for the estate to input £7000 to re-stock the business. On top of this the farm then progressively lost money such that by 1938, there was an additional cash deficit of £8000. There are two key difference between the Abbots Ripton and Ramsey farms. The first was that Abbots Ripton was significantly larger based on the wage bill and cash receipts, which were more than double. So it appears that it was not the turnover but the profitability which was the issue. The second key difference was that Abbots Ripton did not have any turnover from potatoes and roots, and this may account for this lack of profitability. There is insufficient detail to come to any other conclusions, other than the general one that in-hand farming of the larger estates was generally unprofitable.

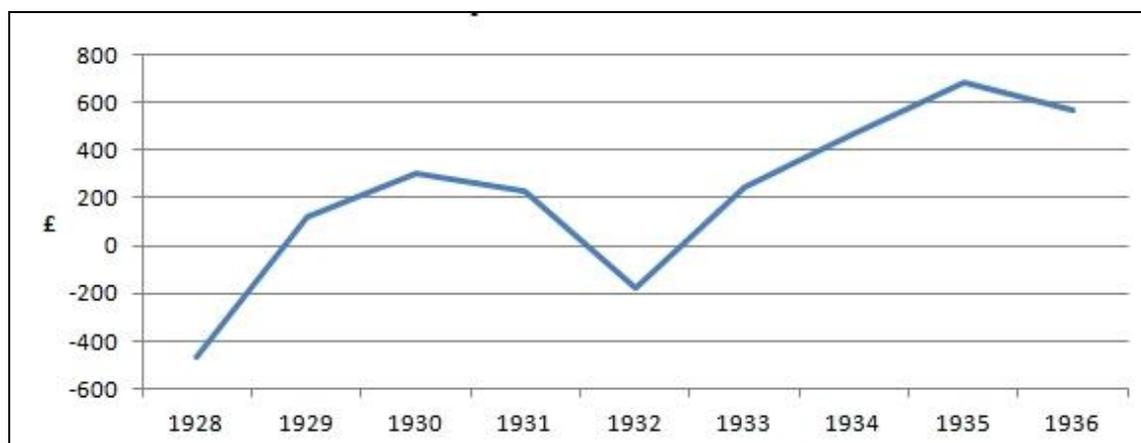
Farms of the Hazell family at Shotesham in Norfolk

As noted on page 187 in Chapter 4, this farm was located five miles south of Norwich. It had been bought in 1921 as a going concern and had made profits in its first three years before going into losses from 1924. It was a mixed operation with some dairy.²⁰⁰

Perversely, Figure 5.61 suggests a recovery from 1929 onwards into the 1930s, with just a dip in 1932. Due to insufficient detail, this record is of limited use.

²⁰⁰ <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/a2a/records.aspx?cat=007-norf11&cid=1-10#1-10> [accessed 24 October 2013]. MERL NORF 11/1/4 to 11/1/8, 1921-1938.

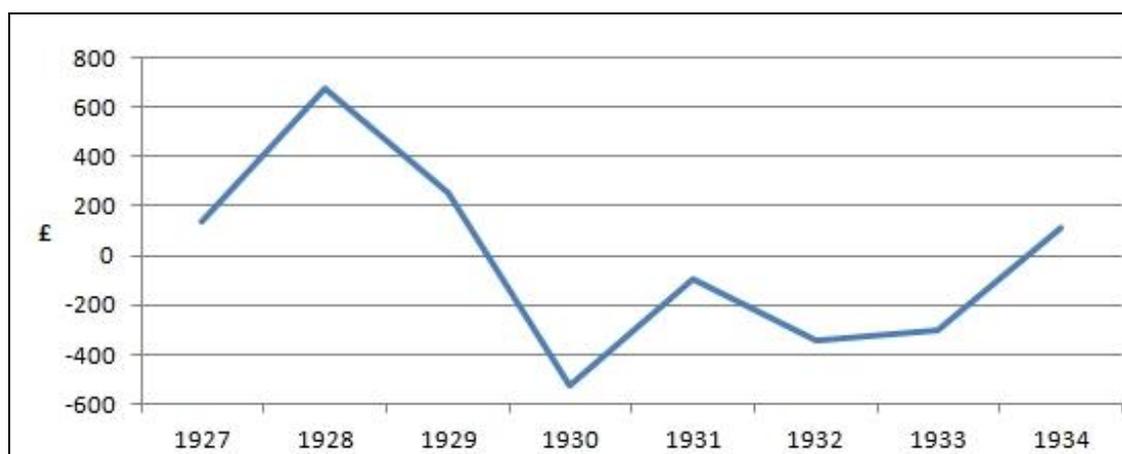
Figure 5.61: *Surplus on the farms of the Hazell family at Shotesham in Norfolk, 1928-1936*



Farm of the Lewin family at Horningsea in Cambridgeshire

This holding was discussed on page 188 in Chapter 4 and the graph of profits from 1927-1934 is shown as Figure 5.62.²⁰¹

Figure 5.62: *Profit at the farm of the Lewin family at Horningsea in Cambridgeshire, 1927-1934*



²⁰¹ MERL CAM 2/1/2-2/1/14. <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/a2a/records.aspx?cat=007-cam2&cid=-1#-1> [accessed 24 October 2013].

The holding was c. 500 acres, and Lewin had decided to move into substantial dairy farming from 1926 . The decline at the start of the 1930s also came earlier than most followed by a period of losses until the figures stopped after 1934. It is a matter of speculation as to whether it was the operation or just the record keeping that ceased.

Oathill Farm, Enstone, Oxfordshire

Under the Cotterstock Lodge example, page 295, reference was made to the farming operations at Oathill Farm, whose success was based on a scientific rather a traditional approach. While this operation does not have extant accounts, its sources of success have been published.²⁰² It was a mixed farming operation, albeit with poultry at its heart, showing that losses were not inevitable if the farmer had a plan rather than leaving himself to the ravages of the farming recession.

Situated on the eastern slopes of the Cotswolds near Enstone in Oxfordshire, brothers George and Frank Henderson, neither of whom had reached their 20s, bought this 85-acre farm in 1924.²⁰³ At the time it was a mixed farm with corn and fattening cattle and a few other livestock. In his last year at school, George had taken a one-year correspondence course with the Agricultural Correspondence College. His first work experience showed that he would not learn from a farmer, who was ‘always behind, or in a muddle with his work. No rotation of crops was followed, no balanced rations fed, or any of the others things that I had expected to find from my correspondence course in agriculture’.

²⁰² G. Henderson, *The Farming Ladder*, (1944, London, 1963).

²⁰³ Henderson, *The Farming Ladder*, pp. 13-71 *passim*. The popularity of the book can be judged from the fact of its fifteen impressions and later editions and reprints. The book is a mine of information of what George Henderson saw as the shortcomings of traditional farming, and farmers’ approaches to the downturn of the 1920s. As a result of the publication of this book in 1944, more than 10,000 people visited the farm, as reported in C. Koenig, ‘Change on the Farm’, *Oxford Times* (10 June 2010).

He learnt later that extremely few farmers used the resources of science. However, a later placement was with one such, whom he considered to be a rare breed. He also kept the books for this farmer and, as a result of his good education, he learnt that one of the key problems of farming was the low rate of turnover of capital, which could only be improved by intensity of production. This formed the basis of his later success, and showed that an intellectual rather than traditional approach to farming could pay dividends.

Poultry became the most important part of the young Henderson's farming business, and this had been built on an experience, when they were eight and ten years old respectively, of helping out on a poultry operation. The recording process led to them developing their own accounts system many years later.²⁰⁴ The success of their poultry operations grew out of their well-read background and an opportunity which came from an auctioneer's mistake in 1926 during the General Strike when they were able to buy pullets, described as cockerels, for the much lower price of 1/8d each rather than six to seven shillings.²⁰⁵ Out of this beginning burgeoned a most successful poultry operation, based on hatching eggs and day old chicks, providing the rapid turnover which was their mantra. It remained part of a mixed farming operation, described in intricate detail in a book spanning nearly 400 pages. An example of their thinking comes from the following quote:

At the bottom of depression in agriculture our only means of making a profit on growing grain was by cashing it through stock. In those days it was possible to walk round the boundaries of our farm and looking over the hedges to see every adjoining field tumbled down to grass; yet when wheat dropped to 18s a quarter,

²⁰⁴ Henderson, *The Farming Ladder*, p. 72.

²⁰⁵ Henderson, *The Farming Ladder*, pp. 92-3.

or a third of the cost of production, we could still keep our land under the plough, by converting grain into fattened poultry, for five pounds of meal will make a pound of chicken, and you could sell twopence-halfpenny worth of wheat for a shilling in a different form.²⁰⁶

When the book was written in 1944, the accounts for the farming operation were extant, but these have now been lost.²⁰⁷ The book records results for 1924, 1932 and 1942, during which period the figures ‘have shown a steadily increasing output and profit over the whole period’. The most interesting year is 1932, at the depth of the farming recession, when a profit of £600 was made. Clearly, not every farmer could have gone in for this particular specialisation, but this example shows that, by application of science and creative thought, the ‘bad’ times of the interwar period could be avoided.

Berkswell Hall Home Farm, Warwickshire

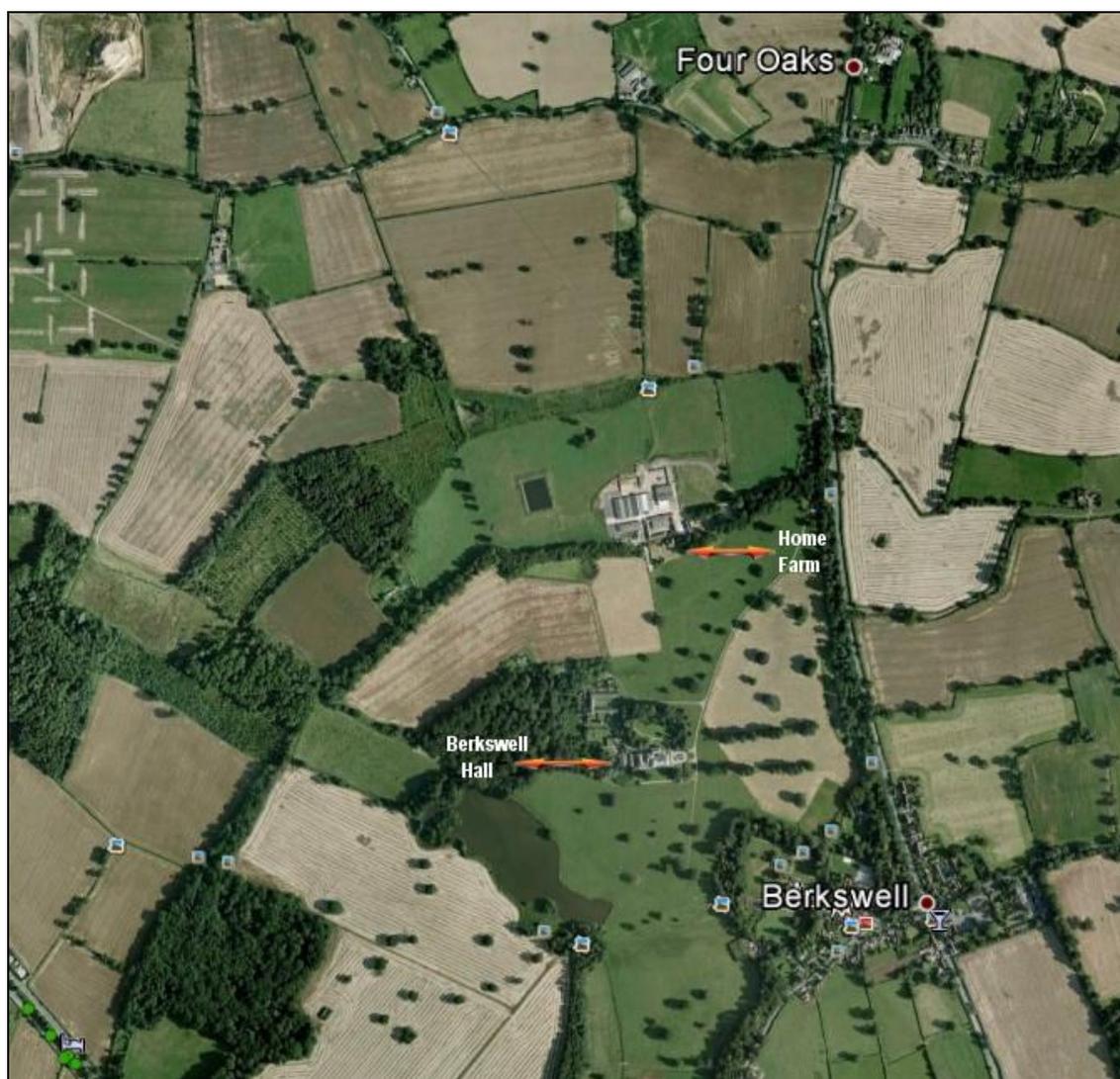
For the period for which cash records were available, Berkswell Hall was owned by Colonel Wheatley. No details of the size of the holding or of the farm were provided with the Record Office deposit, but the National Farm Survey of May 1943 records it as 414 acres, and of being in a good state of cultivation.²⁰⁸ Berkswell is located about five miles to the west of Coventry, and the farm is shown in Figure 5.63.

²⁰⁶ Henderson, *The Farming Ladder*, 231.

²⁰⁷ Henderson, *The Farming Ladder*, pp. 318-335. Pers. comm. Dr. Katharine Keats-Rohan, FSA, FRHistS, (6 January 2014). Pers. Comm. Henderson family, (8 January 2014).

²⁰⁸ TNA, MAF 32/956/Part 2/122.

Figure 5.63: *Location of Berkswell Hall Home Farm*



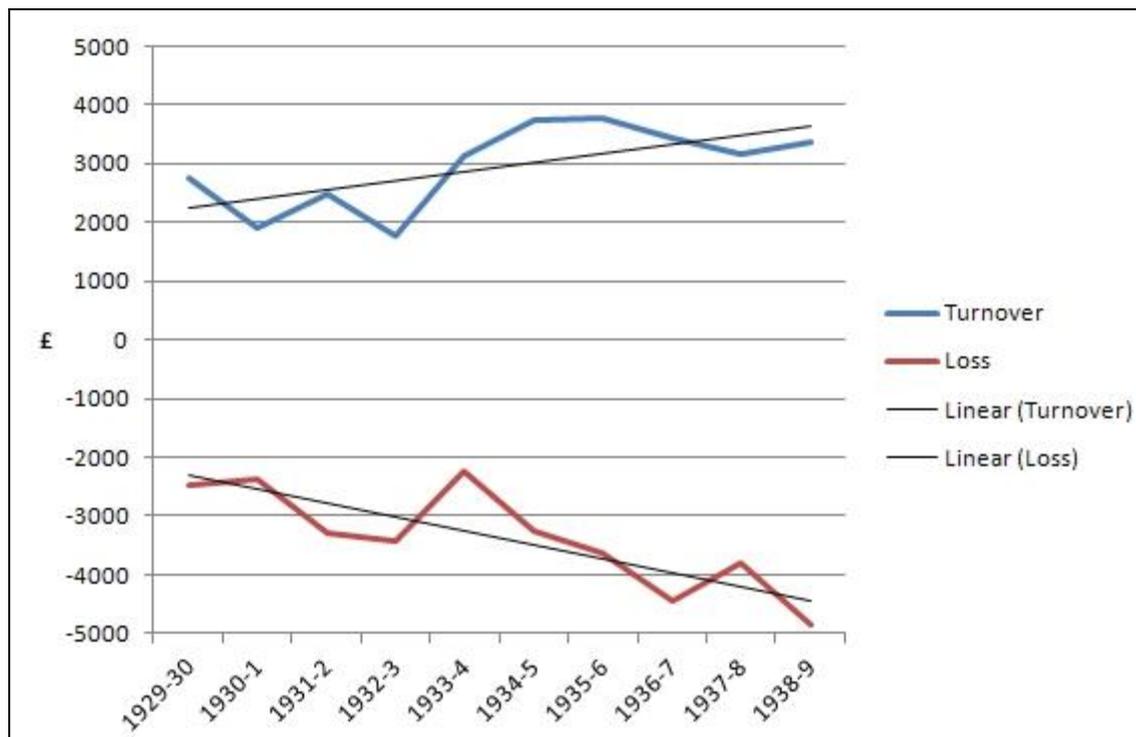
Three cash books and one estate ledger were examined.²⁰⁹ The first of the cash books started with a one-year entry from September 1921 to September 1922 for Home Farm, during which period Wheatley input £1000. It can only be presumed that Home Farm was then let out, but taken back in-hand in 1929 when entries, based on the fiscal year, started again. The farm appeared to have been largely livestock with some arable.²¹⁰ Pig numbers were built up considerably in the middle of the 1930s. The cash book figures have been used to deduce losses for each year, these not reflecting changes in stock

²⁰⁹ Warwickshire RO, CR2576/8 and CR2576/14-16.

²¹⁰ TNA, MAF 32/956/Part 2/122 shows that in 1943, there were 160 acres under arable, 84 cattle, 254 sheep 50 pigs and 212 poultry, worked by a staff of 13.

levels, which were not recorded. As Figure 5.64 shows, the operation was run at a very considerable and increasing loss during the period 1929-1939, despite turnover increasing. This is typical of other in-hand farming operations in this study, albeit the losses are greater in this example.

Figure 5.64: *Berkswell Hall Home Farm turnover and profit 1929-1939*



Elton Hall, Northamptonshire

While there are no farming records for the 1930s, this is included for the information that it provides on tenancies and rent reductions. In Chapter 4, pages 197-204, it was shown that despite the bad times of the 1920s, the Elton Estate had maintained c. 800 acres of farms in-hand and had avoided a flood of rent reductions, but in the early 1930s this had

all started to change.²¹¹ The rent ledgers identified many rent reductions, usually a permanent one accompanied by an additional one- to two-year abatement. Some of the tenants argued about returning to the pre-war rent levels, but the agent in the 1930s stated that he saw no relevance in these, arguing that the purchasing power of money was much greater then; that tax and cost of repairs were less; and that rates were no longer payable on the land. Nevertheless, many rent reductions were agreed, although in some cases the tenants moved to a smaller or cheaper farm. However, the 4 June Returns, shown in a Figure 5.65, make it very clear that many tenancies came to an end with the acreage coming back in-hand.

Figure 5.65: *Elton Hall acreage of farms in-hand 1931-1941*



²¹¹ Estate and farming records of Elton Hall by kind permission of Sir William Proby. There are very extensive estate and family records, which are in the process of being catalogued, but most of the records accessed were from uncatalogued boxes.

Summary of the period 1929-1939

Statistical evidence

The background economic and farming data was discussed in Chapter 3 and earlier in this chapter. After the big fall between 1930 and 1931 was reversed the next year, there was then a downward trend in agricultural GDP from 1932-1938, as shown in Figures 3.2 and 3.3 on pages 62 and 64. Agricultural prices fell between 1929 and 1933, Figure 3.5, page 65, and this price index had not recovered to its 1929 level by 1938. However, with an increasing population, shown in Figure 3.9 on page 67, and with food prices also lower after 1929, expenditure on food rose, Figure 3.10 on page 68. Agricultural income data, Figure 3.11 on page 69, shows that this was flat from 1931 to 1937.

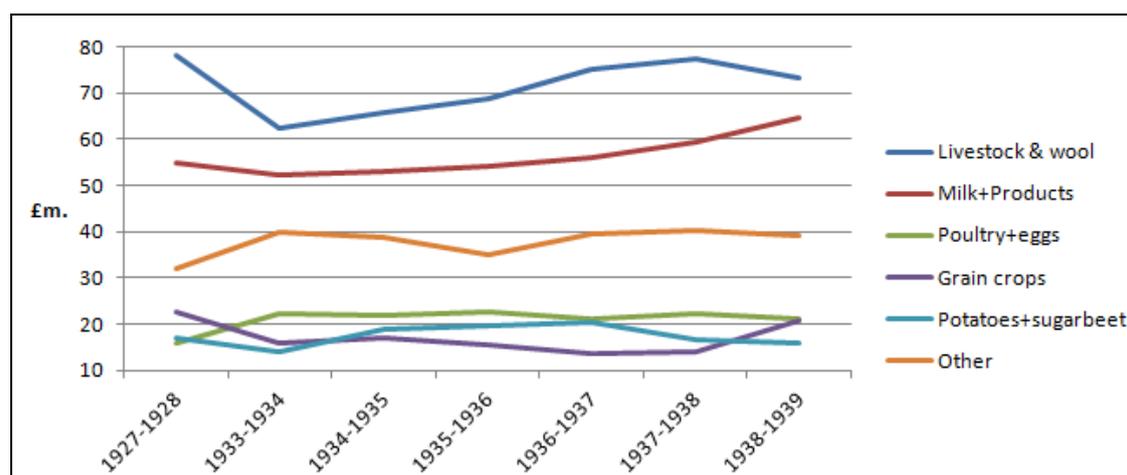
Figure 5.3, page 236, showed the indices of selected agricultural products and identified the winners and losers in price terms in the period to 1939 based on a common index of 100 averaged over 1927-1929. Only milk ended up in 1939 above this level with a two percent increase. Helped by the formation of the Milk Marketing Board, dairying had ‘come of age’ such that by 1939 milk and milk products represented 31 percent of the value of the gross output of agriculture in England and Wales, compared with only 4.5 percent from all grain crops. So a seismic shift had finally taken place compared to the depression of the 1880s and 1890s when grain crops were pre-eminent.²¹² In the same period wheat and cattle fell only slightly from their 1927-1929 level, by two and three percent respectively. Sheep was the worst performer dropping to 75 percent of its 1927-1929 level. As has been shown at Oathill Farm and elsewhere, poultry and eggs were

²¹² Cooper, *British Agricultural Policy*, pp. 94-108, 146-151, 166-180. Howkins, *Death of Rural England*, pp. 52-54.

relatively unscathed, and farmers who were involved in these activities were insulated from the worst of the depression of the 1930s. The index of all agricultural products ended the 1930s at the same level as it opened the decade, while wages increased by nine percent, as shown in Figure 5.2 on page 235.

None of these indices give an insight into output. However, from *Hansard* and other sources, it has been possible to construct a graph of the gross output figures of agricultural holdings, as shown in Figure 5.66.²¹³

Figure 5.66: *Gross output of agricultural holdings, including subsidies, 1927-1939*



Relative to 1927-1928, outputs had generally stagnated other than milk, this reflecting the big increase in dairying referred to later in this conclusion. In the period to 1933-

²¹³ The figures, which include cattle subsidies, are taken from B.P.P., HC, 21 July 1939, CCCL, 903-4, which show £2.0m for 1934-5, £3.9m for 1935-6, £4.0m for 1936-7, £3.9m for 1937-8, and £4.3m for 1938-9. Whetham, *Agrarian History*, Volume 8, p. 260, Tables 49 and 50, pp. 259 and 260, has very different figures showing £3.64m. for 1934-5, £3.94m. for 1935-6 and £3.97m. for 1936-7. MAF, *Agricultural Statistics: Report on the Agricultural Returns, 1939* has completely different numbers, with £1.9m. for 1934-5, £2.7m. for 1935-6 and £2.8m. for 1936-7. Wheat subsidies are taken from B.P.P., HC, 17 December 1937, CCCXXX, 1487. Whetham has the same numbers, while the Agricultural Statistics are marginally lower. The starting points for the graphs were the output figures in 1927-8, with the period from 1933 onwards being shown by reference to this. Unfortunately, Whetham's figures have a gap between 1927-1928 and 1933-1934.

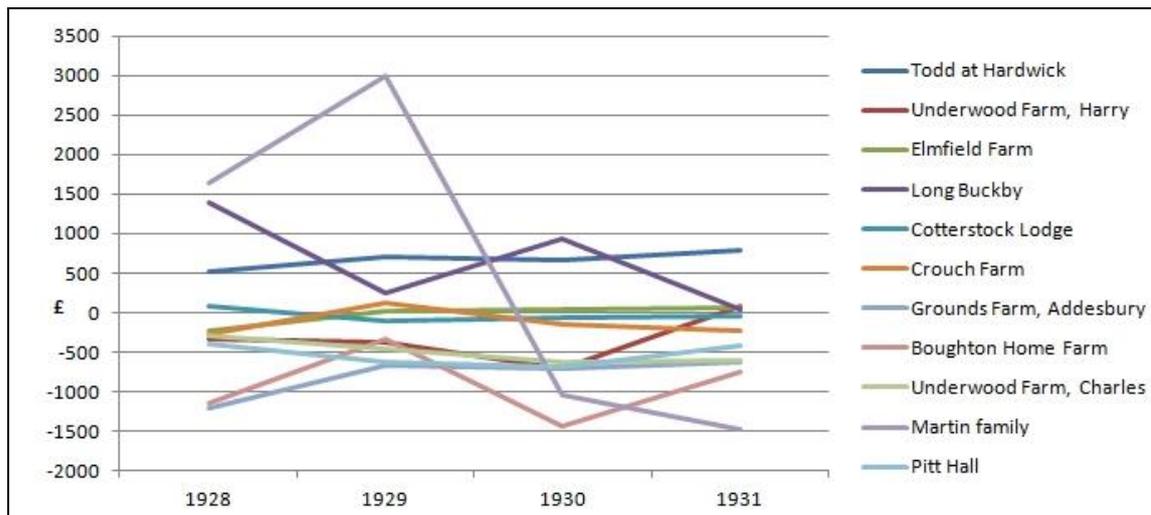
1934, livestock showed the largest monetary fall, a 20 percent drop, but this had recovered by 1937-1938. The fall in grain crops was even larger at 29 percent, and remained at this lower level until 1937-1938 before recovering in 1938-1939.

This statistical evidence suggests no succour for farming in this period with GDP and prices in decline. The gross output figures could suggest better times for livestock in the second half of the 1930s, and also a recovery of mixed farming in the last year of the decade. However, the increase in output for dairy was due to the very significant move by farmers into this sector, suggesting that output figures are not a reliable guide for farming fortunes.

Evidence from the farm studies 1928-1931

Initial analysis of this period was split into two sub-periods, partly because the individual studies did not permit a sufficiency of records for the whole period. The first period considered was 1928-1931, taking a one-year step-back so as to lead up to the Wall Street crash of 1929. There were eleven farms with figures from this period, and the surpluses are shown in Figure 5.67.

Figure 5.67: *Surpluses at 11 farms, 1928-1931*



The results from the Martin farms fluctuated considerably as they did for the earlier period, shown in Figure 4.47 on page 183. The only operation that stayed in profit throughout this period was the livestock and dairying operation of James Todd at Hardwick. Livestock on its own did not fare so well with the anonymous farm at Long Buckby slipping into loss by 1931, and the other Long Buckby livestock operation of Harry Underwood improving to a break-even position by 1931, while his son Charles was still showing losses. Livestock and dairying seems to have held a marginal benefit over mixed farming. The trend of surpluses of these farms, Figure 5.68, shows that fortunes deteriorated after 1929.

Figure 5.68: *Trend of surpluses at 11 farms, 1928-1931*



Evidence from the farm studies after 1931

Less has been written by other commentators about the next sub-period after 1931, despite there being ample evidence of the difficulties then facing farmers. It might be that these commentators had assumed that the re-introduction of a wheat subsidy payment, enacted in 1932, and the cattle subsidy that came in two years later, allowed farming to make a slow recovery. This analysis does not support this. Furthermore, there was anecdotal evidence, referred to on pages 87 and 290, that many tenant farmers gave up early in the 1930s, and this is supported by the increased levels of bankruptcy rising from an average of about 400 during the years 1921-1930 to 500 in 1931 and 600 in 1932, as shown in Figure 4.12 on page 134. As a consequence, farms became difficult to let without a very substantial rent free period of the two to three years necessary to bring some of the farms back from the very run down state that was a spin-off from the world slump. The evidence from Elton Hall, page 322, backs this up.

There was also evidence of an influx of Welsh farmers, which is referred to below. One of the reasons that farmers migrated from regions such as Wales, Scotland and the West Country, was that farming was much tougher on the often poorer lands in such regions with farmers having ‘learnt to live on nothing’.²¹⁴ So, when things became difficult in the period 1875-1900 and again in the 1930s and the Midland farmers gave up, this was an opportunity for these outsiders. One such family moved to Spratton.²¹⁵ Lewis Morgan had previously farmed in South Wales. In 1935, he hired a train to move all his farm animals, farm implements and house furniture from Wales, and took up farming the 202

²¹⁴ Pers. comm. David Llewellyn. His family had moved from Wales to Crick in Northamptonshire in 1900. See also page 288 for references to tenants of the Duke of Buccleuch moving to his Northamptonshire estate.

²¹⁵ Jarvis *et al*, *Spratton*, p. 54. Heaton, *A Farming History of Spratton*, pp. 38-41. Pers. comm. Gwen Morgan, (2009).

acres, vacated by the Gilby family, around Spratton Grange.²¹⁶ Another incomer was the Morris family of Chilton Park Farm, shown in Figure 5.69, in Brill in Buckinghamshire.²¹⁷

Figure 5.69: *Chilton Park Farm in 2014*



Information from the two sides of this family showed that the movement of Welsh farmers to parts of England may have been driven by lack of suitable opportunities for the younger brothers, and that the intelligence that led them to these opportunities may have come from familial connections as well as on the drover grapevine. However, the Morris brothers that stayed behind farming in Wales made a success of this.²¹⁸

Comparison of individual farming operations show differing fortunes or trends depending on the farming activity. Traditional mixed farming was generally flat after 1931, with slight trend differences, probably related to the level of costs. Grounds Farm in Adderbury, known to have had a relatively high cost base, stayed in marginal losses

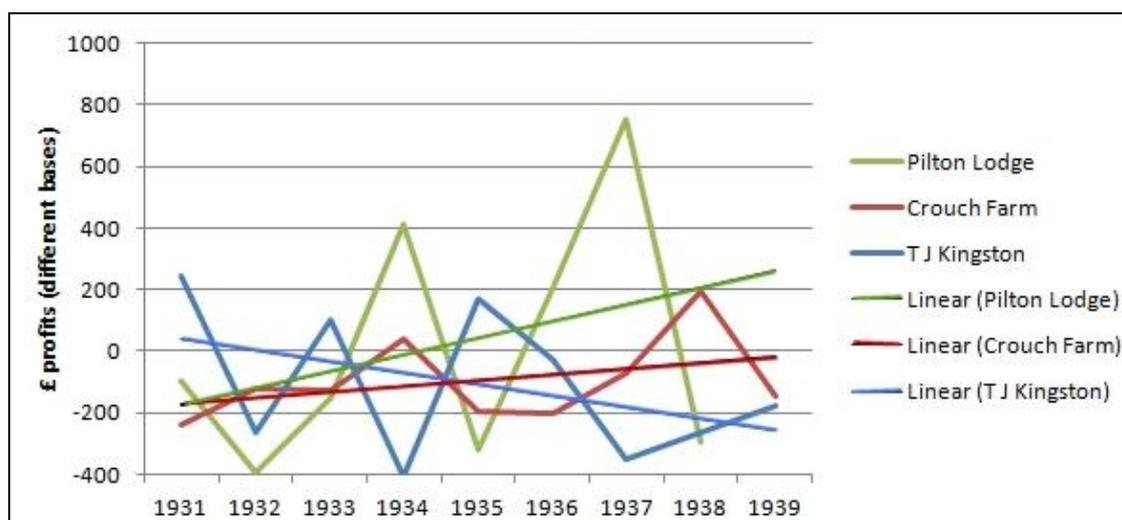
²¹⁶ The Gilby family had, in its turn, moved from Wales to Spratton in about 1877.

²¹⁷ Pers. comm. Peter Morris, (11 February 2014). Contact made through another farmer, introduced by Enstone Local History Society, Oxon.

²¹⁸ Pers. comm. Peter Morris, (11 February 2014).

throughout the period. Crouch Farm, Pilton Lodge and the farming operations of T. J. Kingston are compared in Figure 5.70, which shows marginal differences in the trend lines.²¹⁹

Figure 5.70: Comparison of profits at Pilton Lodge, Crouch Farm, and the farming operations of T. J. Kingston, 1931-1939



Graphical representation of the outcomes of a greater number of farms for this period has been attempted but is almost unintelligible. With many different trading patterns being evidenced, for example the Willmer family's operations at Friars Court operated at break-even; Manor Farm in Shilton moved from loss to profit in 1936; the Martin family in the Isle of Ely became profitable from 1933-1934; the Hazell brothers in Norfolk profitable from 1933. Operations more focussed on livestock generally fared better as shown by the two Underwood family members and the anonymous farm, all at Long Buckby, with James Todd's livestock operation at Hardwick an exception with declining profits through the period. Figure 5.71 seeks to make some sense of these case-studies,

²¹⁹ A comparison of this nature has to be limited to no more than about 3 farms as otherwise it becomes unintelligible.

with five mixed farms and three grazing operations being totalled. The two large estate operations of Boughton Home Farm and Berkswell Home Farm are shown separately.

Figure 5.71: *Surpluses at 11 farms, 1931-1938*

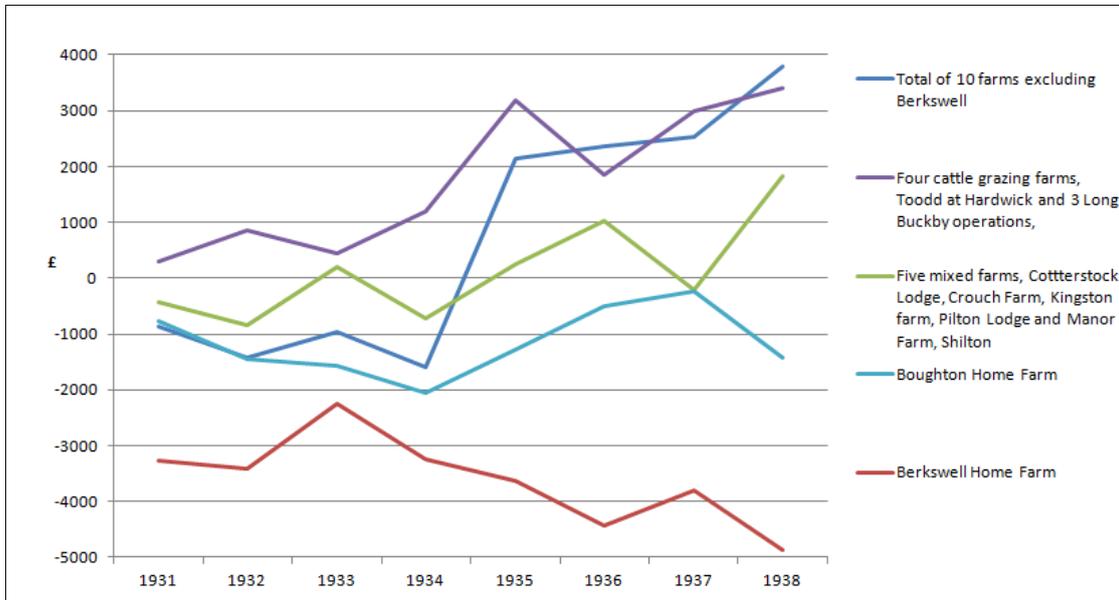
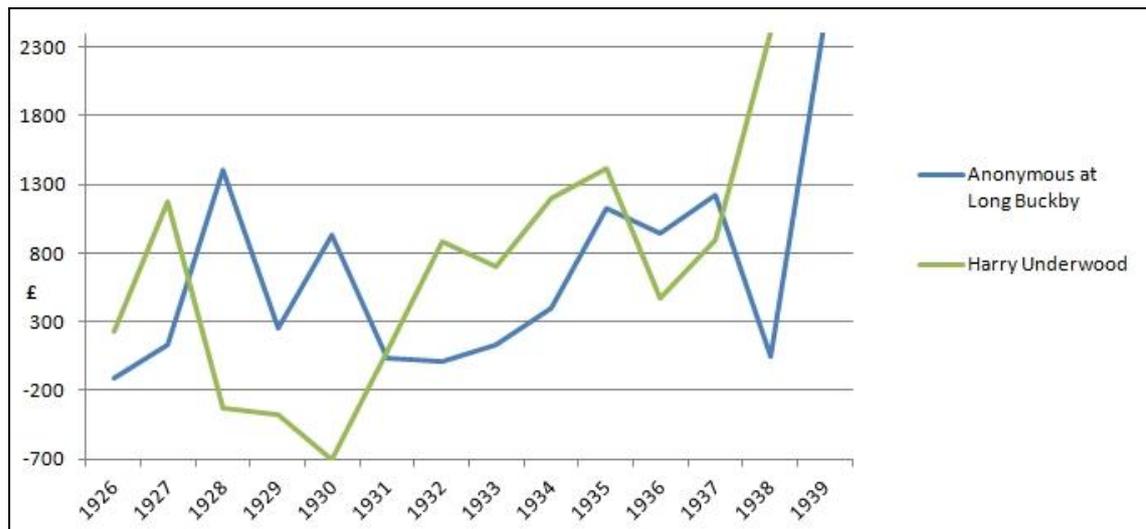


Figure 5.71 confirms that traditional mixed farming was at best flat after 1931 and until 1938. The benefit of the wheat subsidy was short-lived due to the scheme being too successful (as well as an extraordinarily good harvest in 1934), with the ceiling of eight million quarters of wheat being exceeded, and benefits scaled back as a result. Most of the mixed farming operations would also have kept sheep in the traditional sheep-corn approach. So, with the sheep price in severe decline, as shown earlier in Figure 5.10 on page 242, it can be seen that, after 1935, mixed farming was in a worse state than grazing operations. For the graziers, simple livestock fattening, which did not involve holding stock through the winter, fared best, as can be seen from Figure 5.72, which shows the results of two such operations in Long Buckby, Northamptonshire.

Figure 5.72: Comparison of two cattle-fattening operation in Long Buckby, 1926-1939

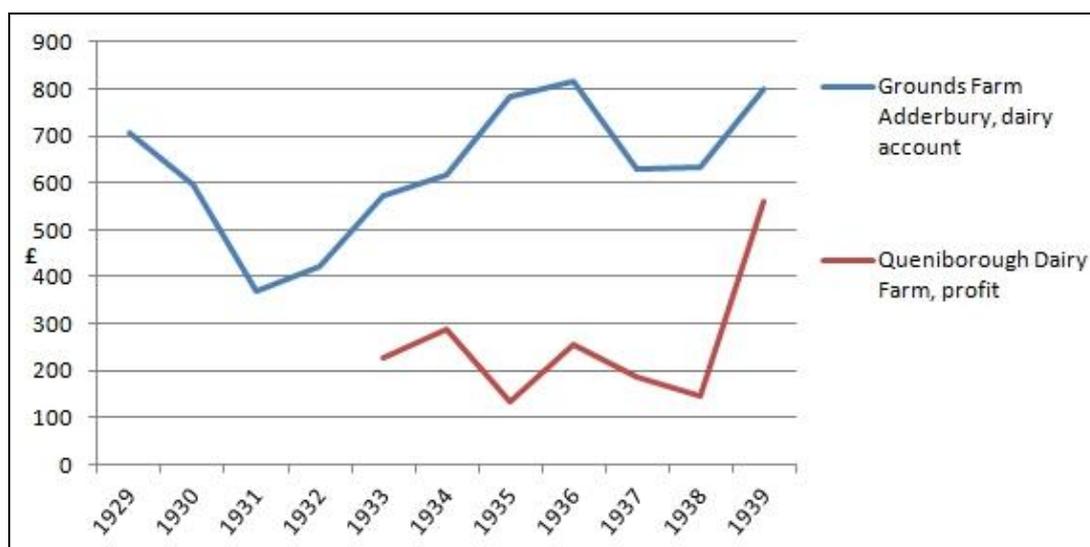


Taken over a longer period from 1926, this comparison is based on the single profit figure from the anonymous farm, so other factors may be hidden within this. However, it seems that, contrary to contemporary commentary about the impacts of the Meat Trusts from 1926 onwards, any effect from these came later, perhaps from 1928 onwards. The downturn at the start of the 1930s was probably more related to world deflation following the Wall Street crash. What appears to be the case from these two studies is that, despite the Ottawa Agreement not permitting import restriction, the upturn for cattle fattening came ahead of, and was then consolidated by, the introduction of the subsidy in 1934. These studies suggest that it was an exaggeration to suggest that the benefit of the subsidy was negated by the fall in prices, although both operations show a dip in 1936. This was the essence of the protest by Earl Alexander of Hillsborough in the House of Commons on 20 January 1937, referred to on pages 264-265. After 1936, cattle fattening improved still further despite, as described earlier on page 265, high imports and reduced beef consumption.

Dairying was certainly not a panacea. Of the four studies with substantial dairying, Queniborough Dairy Farm and the Lewin Farm at Horningsea did not fare any better than

the mixed farms; while Halfway Farm at Kintbury with a mix of farming including dairying seems to have done better. Figures from the Lewin farm, shown in Figure 5.62 on page 316, do not suggest that its dairy operation was at all profitable, but there were no figures after 1934. At Grounds Farm, the dairy account fell steeply after 1929 and only recovered to these earlier levels by 1935-1938, while at Queniborough, dairying was marginally profitable until 1939, as shown in Figure 5.57 on page 312. This is compared in Figure 5.73 with the dairy account at Grounds Farm, Adderbury, extracted from Figure 5.43 on page 299.

Figure 5.73: Comparison of profits at two dairy farms, 1929-1939



From 1937 the prices of cattle and milk moved upwards as shown earlier for cattle in Figure 5.7 on page 240, and for milk Figure 5.9 on page 242.

In-hand farming of the larger estates invariably fared badly, with Home Farm at Berkswell an example of this. The influence of poultry is seen at Cotterstock Lodge which appeared to have moved into profit as a result of this diversification early in the 1930s. Oathill Farm, which specialised in hatching eggs, was another success story.

There were other one-off examples which showed what can be done by innovating with the Parsons family at Radford Farm breeding their own sheep and buying in calves only a few days old; the Cumber family running a shire horse stud; and, maybe, the farmer near Nottingham who went ‘all-intensive and covered the landscape with garden peas’!²²⁰

Unless farmers were only involved in simple cattle-fattening or were particularly innovative or had chosen to make the right diversification at the right time, there was not much succour to be had right through the 1930s, with government subsidies, at best, keeping some farmers out of bankruptcy.

These sector differences are examined in more detail in Table 5.3 where the profit results for the period 1931-1938 are shown in descending order of cash surplus for this period, these figures being set against the type of farming that was being carried on.

Table 5.3: *Profit trends in the 1930s*

		Down trends	Significant up-trends	Overall trends	£ Surplus 1931-1938
Harry Underwood	Cattle fattening	To 1930	1931 onwards	Up	8055
Radford Farm	Livestock	1931, 1935 and 1936	1933-1934, 1937 on	Profitable all 1930s	6837
Halfway Farm	Dairy	To 1932, 1934	1935 on	Up from 1931 when figures start	4051
Anonymous at Long Buckby	Cattle fattening	To 1932	1933 onwards	Up	3934
James Todd	Livestock and dairy	To 1934, 1936-1938	1935	Down	2496
Cotterstock Lodge	Mixed	To 1931		Up	1137
Manor Farm, Shilton	Mixed			Up from 1932	255

²²⁰ D. Hartley, *The Countryman's England* (1980, London, 1935), pp.32-33.

Charles Underwood	Cattle fattening	To 1933	1934 onwards	Up	197
Pilton Lodge	Mixed	To 1932, 1935, 1938	1934, 1937, 1939	Slight upwards	120
Crouch Farm	Mixed	1929-1931, 1935-1936	1934, 1937	None evident	-712
Boughton Home Farm	Mixed estate	1931-1934, 1938	1937	Variable	-9301
Berkswell Home Farm	Mixed estate	To 1930, 1933		Down	-28,392
Cumber farms	Various			Capital account fell until 1938	Not available
Martin farms	Mixed	To 1933	1934 onwards	None evident	Not available after 1936 but profitable
Grounds Farm dairying only	Dairy			Improved after 1931	Not available
Queniborough	Dairy			Level from 1933 when figures start	All years not available but profitable
Lewin	Dairy			Level	break-even 1931-4

Where figures existed back to 1929, most, but not all, farms experienced a fall in their profits from 1929 or soon after, with this lasting to 1933 or even 1934 in two cases. This trend was probably inevitable following the Wall Street Crash. Earlier in this chapter, page 252, it was shown that, in the East of England and according to the Cambridge Farm Economics branch, there was an improvement in the fortunes of arable farmers in 1933 as a result of a better harvest plus the benefit of the wheat subsidy. There are two mixed farms in Table 5.3 which follow this trend, Cotterstock Lodge and Manor Farm, Shilton, but the evidence is hardly over-whelming. As the 1930s progressed, farms showed almost random up and down trends.

Conclusion for the period 1929-1939

The conclusions from Table 5.3 are compelling with livestock and dairy occupying the top five positions. Mixed farming was generally close to break-even over the period, although it perhaps improved slightly as the decade progressed. Even the wily and resourceful Gibbard at Crouch Farm notched up an overall loss of £700 over the period. Specialisation was a benefit in the two cases, Radford Farm and the Cumber farms, where this was identified.

A comparison between the conclusions of these studies and those of contemporary commentators shows a divergence of opinion. By January 1935, *Country Life* had thought that prospects for farming were better than they had been for some years as a result of government policy of organising distribution and the safeguarding of markets.²²¹ This sweeping generalisation is shown to have been very wide of the mark, with the only area of improvement, cattle fattening, owing very little to government actions. It was also at odds with the circumstances in Northamptonshire, essentially a sheep-corn county, which led to the local branch of the Farmers' Union lobbying county MP's on 7 July 1936, as discussed on page 263.

Amongst later commentators, Brassley concluded that farm incomes fell over this period, but he and Howkins considered that the unrelieved gloom of the interwar period overstated events.²²² The evidence from this study points to very limited sectors of farming

²²¹ *CL*, 77, 1983 (19 January 1935), p. 54.

²²² Howkins, *Death of Rural England*, pp. 75-6. Brassley, 'British farming between the wars', pp. 187-199.

which bucked the trend of very poor performance of agriculture in the period 1929-1939. It also supports writers who based their opinions on contemporary observations. In the foreword to his 1937 *Farming England*, Street described the deplorable state of agricultural land which he found during his travels, as already discussed on pages 272-273.²²³ These sentiments were echoed by Lord Addison, also based on a fact-finding tour as discussed on page 272. In addition, there were other examples of run-down swathes of land being recorded.²²⁴ However, none of the research carried out here supports the extreme view of Sir Henry Tate that there were ‘miles of land which had been acutely farmed but went derelict’ or that a prospective tenant could just ‘walk into an empty farm’. So conditions were generally bad during the 1929-1939 period with bankruptcies up by a quarter in 1931 and by a half in 1932, as discussed earlier. But the total increase was some 300 farmers over these two years, so it was hardly the conditions which Tate described.

The specific evidence from the individual studies has provided an insight into the differing fortunes of the farming sectors, information not found elsewhere. By 1938, war was in the air, and politicians were preoccupied with how they might deal with the agricultural challenge in that event, while farmers were poised between the ills of the earlier 1930s and the expectation of better times on the agricultural front in the event of war. These better times were still around the corner.

²²³ NRO, ML 3825, Minutes of this deputation dated 7 July 1936.

²²⁴ M. Soper, *Years of Change* (Ipswich, 1995), p. 44. This refers to farmland to the sides of the road from St Neots to Cambridge being covered with scrub and bushes; alongside the railway line from Didcot to Swindon being rush-infested; and to the rabbit and ragwort-infested chalk downlands of Hampshire and Wiltshire.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

This study set out to find empirical evidence of the fortunes of individual farmers during the interwar period from a significant study area based around, but not restricted to, the Midlands. This presented a considerable challenge as, apart from a very extensive contemporary survey carried out by University of Cambridge, almost no evidence from individual farms has ever been examined and published. The Cambridge survey, while very extensive, was largely restricted to a three-year period and is not, therefore, representative of the whole interwar period.

The national trends, examined in considerable detail in Chapter 3, inform on general social and economic data such as population data, bank base rates, GDP, employment, and bankruptcies. They also cover general and agricultural wholesale prices, wage and income indices, and consumer general and food expenditure. Farming trends from MAF data include trends and acreages of arable and permanent grass and livestock, and outputs and prices of corn crops, livestock and milk. The generality of farming in the period of the 1920s is covered by a reasonable body of contemporary material, with the columns of *Country Life* making an important contribution, as well as the League of Nations retrospective report of 1931. However, the same does not apply to the 1930s where, apart from *Country Life*, the historiography is almost silent, perhaps believing that once government took on a more interventionist role, starting with the Wheat Act of 1932, farmers were over the worst. This research shows this not to be the case, and shines a light on this period of farming which has been almost totally ignored by researchers.

None of the contemporary material or subsequent research set out to show how the general social, economic and agricultural trends affected profitability of individual farming operations.

Insufficient base material for studies of individual farms exists in the county record offices, with only nine such records being found in ten such offices researched. To be useful a record needed to have economic data to inform on profitability, with this spanning a sufficient period to demonstrate trends. By far the largest deposit was found in the Museum of English Rural Life at Reading. Of the more than 20 records examined, nine of these resulted in a useful study. The challenge faced by this research was to extend this number by uncovering private records in the hands of farming families who had survived the interwar period and had cause to retain such records. A further 17 records were found using a variety of personal approaches doubling the number of case-studies publicly available.

The evidence from the 35 case-studies is shown to line up very closely with the national trends, where these are clear. This is encouraging as it obviates any challenge to or criticism of either the sample size or composition of these studies. The studies span a wide variety of farming types and a significant geographic area, the latter focussed around the Midlands. While it does not represent circumstances for pastoral farming on the hills of Wales or Scotland, it was always the intention that the study would look at essentially mixed farming rather than monoculture. This study, therefore, offers a unique insight into the fortunes of individual farming operations throughout the interwar period, and examines the profitability of the different components of traditional mixed farming. It also identifies any benefits from competitive advantage or specialism in farming, and

shows that farmers who diversified were often better placed to weather the very long downturn of the period.

The benefit of significant profits in the second half of the Great War

The evidence from farms where records were found back to 1916 or earlier was that, from 1915, 1916 or 1917, the profits of these operations rose significantly, falling away around 1919 or 1920. Such farms were Crouch Farm, Home Farm at Boughton House, the Cumber farming operations, Harry Underwood's cattle fattening business, the farms of the Martin family in the Isle of Ely, Pitt Hall Farm in Hampshire, and the Lamb family farm at Sibford Ferris. Only in the case of Crouch Farm is it known how these surpluses were invested and the importance of this buffer later on. None of these operations appeared to have been under any significant threat as the bad times of the interwar years unfolded, but things might have been different for the smaller operations had they not built up that cushion. There is also a distinction between those who had the opportunity to build up their cash reserves and those in the next section who either came into farming or acquired their freehold soon after the end of the Great War.

Newly financed operations from around 1920

A number of newly financed operations was uncovered by the research. Of course, it was not known how these purchases were funded and whether some or all of the money had been accumulated from farming or other profits in prior years. Five of these were anecdotal only, without any figures, and these were discussed in Chapter 4, pages 129-132. The Laughton family in Leicestershire bought 150 acres for some £3150, and it took them until the early part of the Second World War to pay this off. Robert Cozens acquired a 241-acre farm in Roade, Northamptonshire, in 1920 for some £3700, and he

weathered the storm of the interwar years. Thomas Naylor bought a 147-acre farm in Bradley, Derbyshire for £3400 in 1919, and appeared to have funded this purchase very quickly by seizing the opportunity to buy livestock being sold at auction at knock-down prices and trade these on. Eight members of the wider Warren family from the Dunton Bassett area of Leicestershire acquired their farms immediately after the Great War, but four of these were bankrupted very quickly. There was just one example with supporting profit figures, which related to a farm tenanted by H. R. Overman at Brampton Ash in Northamptonshire, pages 190-195. It is surmise that this was a new operation in 1920, and it also appears that the farm had been taken over in a very run-down state. Overman sold up in 1929 and transferred the business to a relation, but whether as a result of 'distress' or retirement is a matter of speculation. However, his figures showed that he made increasing losses over his nine years with the business.

The effect on farmers of the deflation of 1920-1921

Figures 4.2 and 4.3, pages 98 and 99, showed that a big across-the-board fall in prices started in the middle of 1920, but became a rout by the end of that year and through to the middle of 1921. From the few studies where this can be ascertained, farmers' reaction to this was almost universally to come out of the cattle-buying market while prices were re-adjusting, and the Crouch Farm case-study was particularly instructive. However, farmers had to live that year and most continued to sell their livestock in order to provide cash flow. The adjustment was so rapid that, in the space of not much more than 12 months, a new price regime was established. At the time farmers did not know whether the fall might continue. Overman at Brampton Ash was late into taking action on the falling price and was still buying cattle in 1921, and was late in coming back into this market, buying no cattle in either 1922 or 1923. It appears also that he took the advice of

the Ministry of Agriculture and decided to move away from arable to dairying and pigs. This combination was totally disruptive of his business and his losses ratcheted up through to the end of the 1920s.

The period 1922 to 1924-1925

Most farmers recovered quickly after this period of deflation and by 1923 or 1924, with the studies showing that farming fortunes were improving. This was in line with the outputs of the Agricultural Tribunal of 1922, with the emphasis of its second interim report in mid 1923 suggesting signs of an upturn, and by May 1924, reporting clear evidence of recovery. However, farmhand militancy and foot-and-mouth disease took the edge off this recovery.

Wage increases in 1924-1925, re-joining the Gold Standard in 1925, and towards 1928

The agricultural labourers' strike in 1923 had achieved a halt in the decline in wages. However by early 1925, these had moved up again by around 13 percent. This had resulted, as was shown by Table 4.9, page 222, in profits turning down generally from about that time with graziers seemingly less affected due to lower manning levels. As was shown in Figure 3.2, page 62, the strait-jacket of the Gold Standard ushered in a short period of recession. For the general economy this was in 1926, but for agriculture the figures suggest that it was one year later. So, almost all the studies showed a decline from 1926, with cattle-fattening a year or so later. With the possible exception of dairying (there was insufficient case-study evidence but Kitchen's autobiography, *Brother to the Ox*, suggests this), all sectors of farming appear to have been equally affected and only those who had a specialisation or a competitive edge bucked this trend. A very modest recovery followed for some in 1928 or 1929.

Fall-out from the Wall Street Crash in the 1930s

After years of *laissez-faire*, government finally decided to step in with subsidies, first for wheat, then for cattle, but these were a classic case of ‘too little too late’. The great majority of corn was grown in mixed farming operations and, in the traditional sheep-corn Midlands, there was also a high predominance of sheep. So, on the one hand while the wheat subsidy introduced in 1932 helped the plight of these farmers, the savage drop in the price of sheep due to the high level of imports almost certainly negated this benefit. Matters were worsened due to the success of the wheat scheme in increasing its output resulting in the rate of subsidy being scaled back in 1934, as also evidenced by the Cambridge study, published in 1936. The benefit of the cattle subsidy, introduced in 1935, was devalued by a drop in price in 1936.

1936 onwards

Contemporary commentary as well as analysis by other commentators shows a divergence of opinion as to the state of farming in the second half of the 1930s. This is now easily explained with the studies showing that there was no succour for mixed farming; pure arable and dairy may have improved a little; while cattle fattening became significantly profitable. An overview of farming by sectors is shown below.

Wheat and corn products

Despite its relatively small financial output as a percentage of all agricultural products, wheat cultivation was at the emotional heart of contemporary dialogue and has a similar place in the general bibliography. Presumably, this was because of its association with our ‘daily bread’. Historically Figures 3.19 and 3.22, on pages 76 and 77, showed that the output of oats was more than double that of wheat, but also that the outputs of all three

main cereal crops was in steady decline from the end of the Great War, as was the price of these commodities until this was reversed around 1936. In East Anglia, arable improved in 1933 as a result of the subsidy and a good harvest (but then levelled off), with these conditions being found in two of the Northamptonshire studies of farms which had a relatively high arable content.

Cattle

Figures 3.24 to 3.27, pages 79-80, showed that, with the decline in arable after the war, cattle numbers had increased but prices had reduced. With relatively lower wage costs, graziers were spared the worst of the impact of higher wages in 1924-1925. The upward trend of cattle numbers was interrupted between 1927 and 1931, and this was the nadir of profitability of this branch of farming. The main cause of this centres around the powerful positions of the American Meat Trusts, which by the mid-1925s appear to have taken control of the meat market. There were many siren calls for graziers in 1926 and 1927 from *Country Life* and the Farmers' Union. At Crouch Farm, the cattle surplus peaked in 1926 and then went into decline, while the two cattle-fattening operations in Long Buckby suggest that the downturn came even later in 1928 or 1929. The Ottawa Agreement prevented the government from restricting imports, so the cattle industry limped on until given a fillip by the introduction of the cattle subsidy in 1934. Curiously the three cattle-fattening studies of long Buckby operations, shown for this period in Chapter 5 on pages 291-294, suggest that things started to improve ahead of this. The benefit of the cattle subsidy was offset to a degree by a drop in prices in 1936, but thereafter cattle graziers appear to have out-performed the other sectors. Dairying showed some positive results after the setting up of the precursor of the Milk Marketing Board, but was certainly not a panacea.

Sheep

Many factors similar to those which affected the cattle market also influenced sheep farming, with the key issue being that imports were unchecked. Figure 3.33, page 85, suggests that, throughout the whole of the 1930s, this branch of farming was simply a matter of supply and demand with farmers calling the market wrongly. Even in Wales, as referred to on page 266, Moore-Colyer considered that sheep farming suffered badly through the 1930s, this conclusion being based on annual visits by J Pryse Howell to 50-60 farms. But with different farms visited each year, direct comparison is of questionable value, and cattle and sheep are aggregated together in the conclusions. With cattle fattening improving in the second half of the 1930s, as has been shown by this thesis, such a trend from Moore-Colyer's work tends to support the gloomy conclusions from this thesis of sheep farming throughout the 1930s.

Specialisation and competitive edge

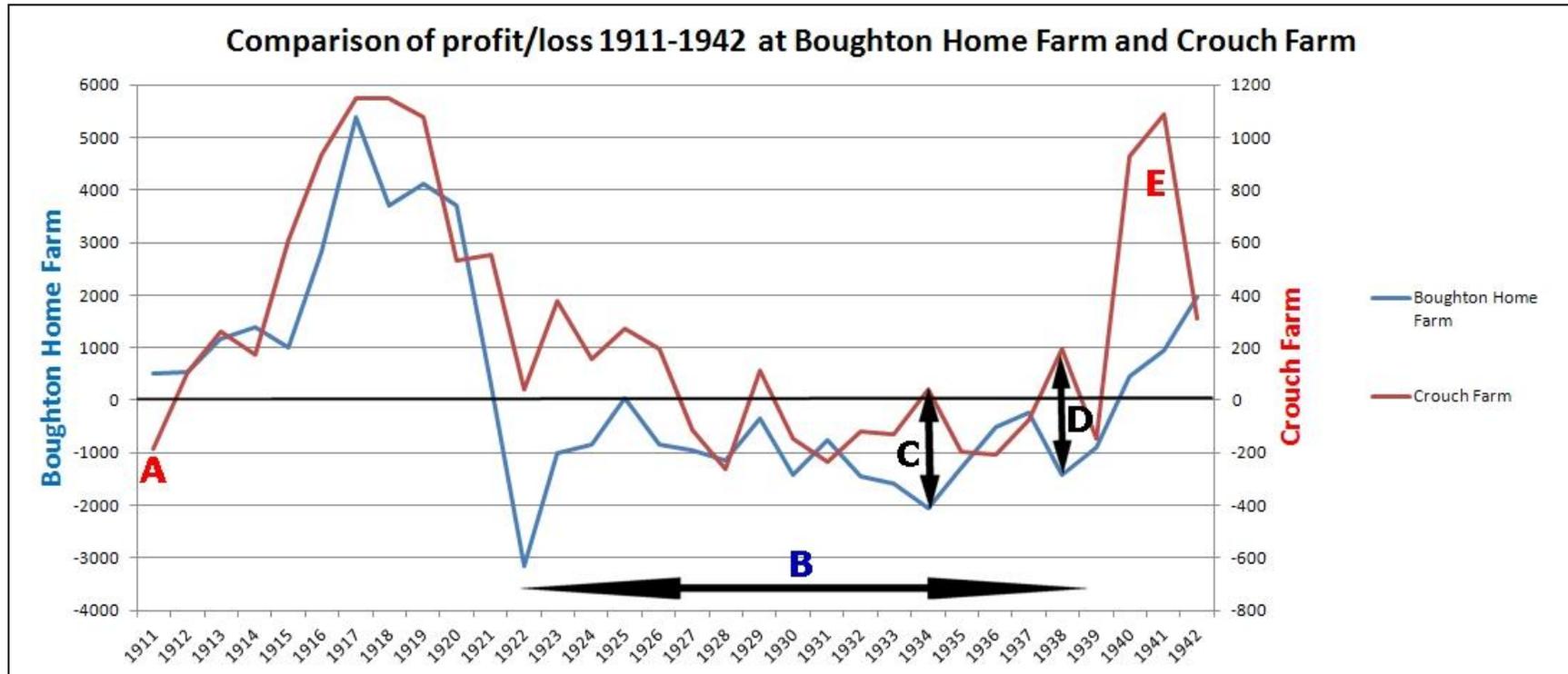
Most farmers may not have had a realistic option to change their operation or have been reluctant to do so. However, the Lewin family made a switch into dairying in 1926-1927, but only recorded break-even results in the 1930s, so whether this was a boon or not is not clear. A few examples of competitive edge or individualisation were encountered. The Cumber family operation, analysed on pages 173-175 and 287-290, went seriously into shire horses and did extremely well as a result. At Radford Farm, as shown on pages 300-303, the Parsons family bought their cattle stock as very young calves, and reared all their own sheep, never buying in any, and these two approaches gave them buying-price edges. Although unsupported by figures, Henderson's operation at Oathill Farm, discussed on pages 317-319, went in for specialisation in hatching eggs and day-old

chicks, and seemingly prospered. In a further example, an unidentified farmer in Nottinghamshire turned his acres over to peas, with unknown results.

Comparison of two farming operations, 1911-1942

Similar trends are found in many of the other studies of individual farming operations to those summarised in Figure 6.1, on the next page, for the two very different farming operation, Crouch Farm and Boughton House Home Farm, for the period 1911-1942. The figures from the 165-acre Crouch Farm near Banbury are cash surpluses without taking account of stock changes, which were not recorded, while the figures from the 547-acre Home Farm at Boughton are true profit and loss figures after taking account of stock adjustments. Both show similar trends as can be seen from Figure 5.1, page 234, albeit Home Farm ran at a loss for the period 1922-1939 inclusive, while Crouch Farm ran at a loss from 1927-1939 (except in 1929, 1934 and 1938 when there were marginal profits). The five main differences in the graph shapes are identified by the letters A to E, and reasons for these are shown below the graphs.

Figure 6.1: Profit comparisons at Boughton Home Farm and Crouch Farm, 1911-1942



A Start up mid 1910

B Higher relative labour cost at Boughton Home Farm

C Benefit of arable at Crouch Farm

D Low cattle sales value at Boughton Home Farm that year

E This high peak followed by a dip is unexplained, but may be because figures are not stock adjusted

Conclusion

From around 1915 or 1916, farming profits surged in line with the inflation in prices and these circumstances prevailed until around the end of 1919. This resulted in a very short resumption of a favourable market in the sale of farms by the larger estates, picking up a trend which had started just before the Great War. These sales were not overwhelmingly successful, with many sitting tenants not buying but some new money, presumably made in the inflationary period of the war, coming into farming.

From the middle of 1920, the inflationary spiral unwound very rapidly over a period of about 12 months. Little contemporary material had described the boom in agriculture, although A. G. Street in *Farmer's Glory* wrote about farmers swanking and a time of plenty. The subsequent bust was much discussed in terms of 'betrayals' and the resulting imbalance between output prices and wages. *Country Life*, a previously neglected source by other researchers of the state of farming, debated the issues facing farmers in its columns, as did the Farmers' Club into its proceedings. But, other than in one or two isolated incidents, neither spelt out the individual fortunes of farmers or farming sectors.

Bankruptcies, shown in Figure 3.36 page 87, are perhaps one of the best overall guides to the fortunes of farmers, with these considerably down during the Great War but peaking after the deflationary period of 1920-1921; after the re-introduction of the Gold Standard in 1925; and in the early 1930s, when this reached its highest levels in the study period. Another contemporary guide was provided by the 1922 Agricultural Tribunal, which finally reported in 1924, and which found that farming had improved during its period of investigation. Other than this Tribunal, the 1920s was a period of governmental *laissez-faire*, so there is little other source material for a researcher to fall back on.

There was a retrospective report by the League of Nations report in 1931, which followed an earlier one of 1927, and summarised the position of agriculture in the United Kingdom after the end of the war. This confirmed the crisis after 1920-1921; the improvement by 1924; another downturn after 1925; and then noted a worsening situation since its 1927 report. From the various sources, there is thus a clear picture of the overall state of agriculture in the period to around 1930.

These trends are replicated generally by the studies in this thesis. The dip in fortunes, based on the outcomes of ten farms and resulting from the period of deflation in 1920-1921, is shown in Figure 4.78, page 219. There is evidence of how some farms may not have survived this rapid change, with Brampton Ash, pages 190-195, the best case-study in this respect. The key profit changes for the remainder of the period from 1922 to 1929 is shown in table 4.9 on page 222, which summarises the outcomes from 14 farms. This shows that profits improved in 1923-1924, but then worsened in 1926-1928. The relative prospects of some of the farming sectors showed that arable suffered more and dairying less as the decade progressed, but there was no clear picture from cattle fattening.

It was altogether a different situation in the 1930s, with scant contemporary information about how agriculture was faring. Government became interventionist from 1932 onwards with support first for wheat, then cattle, and later other products. The extent of support was minimalist but, despite this, in 1936 several members of parliament, particularly Earl Alexander of Hillsborough, felt that they had been too generous to the graziers, see page 264. This is borne out by the case studies which show cattle fattening to have been the best sector in the second half of the 1930s.

In this same period, a number of contemporaries, such as Street and Lord Addison, travelled around England and reported on the parlous state of the countryside and agriculture. There was, therefore, a general view that the 1930s was a difficult period, but the unrelieved gloom scenario has been subsequently challenged by Howkins and Brassley, leaving confusion as to how the 1930s should be regarded.

Surprisingly, Howkins' challenge lacked any substance producing no evidence to counter the arguments of contemporary writers such as Bell, Street and Addison. Brassley's work, referred to on page 18, was far more comprehensive. It sought to measure agricultural productivity by deriving this from the value of outputs in constant RPI terms based on 1986 prices which were then adjusted by his agricultural price index. He showed that financial outputs hardly moved upwards before 1935, and then did so as a result of improvements in cereal yields from varietal changes and improved fertilisers and feeding stuffs. In addition and speculatively, there was the start of savings from mechanisation. While none of the studies for this thesis touch directly on productivity, there were instances found where farm operations were carried on with reduced manpower in the 1930s without apparent detriment. This is an area where further work is needed, but any such increase due to increased tractor numbers appears to be very marginal considering that only some 100,000 were in use by 1942, see the footnote on page 290. Brassley's argument that the gloom of the interwar years was overdone seems to be based, however, on the decline in cereal outputs being tempered by expanding sugar beet production, a sector not covered by this thesis; increased sheep numbers, which this thesis finds unprofitable; increased cattle for fattening, which this thesis finds to be the main source of improvement in the second half of the 1930s; and by increased numbers of dairy cows, pigs and fowls, sectors not covered by this thesis. Brassley takes these increases in outputs as a sign of increased farming productivity, albeit tempered by

his own views that much more research is needed on this. His soundly-based approach tracks the improvements in productivity which became significant from the 1940s. However, there is insufficient reliable and published data for most of his key components of productivity gains for this 1935-1939 period to prove that this may have been the dawn of such improvements. This thesis agrees that there was an uplift in the price of beef, which fed through to significant improvements in the fortunes of cattle fattening, but this is hardly an area where productivity changes would have played a major part. It also supports Brassley's arguments for benefits from innovation and specialisation. But, in addition, it gets to the root of why some enterprises succeeded but others failed, and which branch or branches of farming provided the best chance of success or even survival, an issue not addressed by contemporary material or subsequent analysis.

The trend of surpluses at 11 farms for the period 1928-1931, Figure 5.68 on page 326, shows clearly that farming was recovering up until 1930 but then fell as a consequence of the world slump following the Wall Street crash. The period from 1931-1939, also based on 11 farms in Figure 5.71 on page 330, shows a divergence between the branches of farming. Despite the wheat subsidy, there was no succour for mixed farming with this hovering around break-even until 1938. While the improvements in cattle fattening are clear, there were insufficient studies of dairying to come to a firm conclusion, but those that there were suggested that it was not a panacea for the 1930s. It was, perhaps, a better alternative for the many farmers who moved away from traditional mixed farming and into milk during this period,. It is difficult to disaggregate sheep farming from the results of mixed farmers, but the indices in Figures 5.3 and 5.10, pages 236 and 242, show it to have been one of the worst performers, due to an over-supplied market dominated by imports. Crouch Farm was the one study where some insight into this was possible with

Figure 5.21, page 282, showing the narrow gap between buying and selling prices, with buying prices apparently even exceeding selling prices in 1934 and 1935.

Over the whole period, there were the few case-studies, summarised on page 344, where innovation was the key to success against the odds. The Cumber shire horse operation was one such, and the continuing success of this has been explained; Radford Farm with its competitive edge of buying in few-day-old calves was another; and Oathill Farm with its hatching eggs business a third. The smaller mixed farming operations were, almost certainly, unable to do anything other than go on as they had for many years, although in the 1930s some of these moved into dairying.

While this research provides key information not found elsewhere to provide much more detail on the interwar period, particularly the 1930s, it raises further questions which this study does not answer. The productivity issue, referred to earlier, is one such. Then there is the absence of sufficient evidence on dairying to answer the question as to its profitability in the 1930s. Surprisingly, sheep appeared to be particularly unprofitable in the 1930s. For such a basic component of farming, this study needs to be extended to look in more detail at the fortunes of sheep farming, albeit that Moore-Colyer's work seems to support the conclusions of this thesis. More case studies are needed for dairying, and the sugar beet and pig sectors require more attention. Finally, there is the unresolved question as to why cattle fattening improved so much from 1936, particularly given that the diet was moving away from beef consumption.

This study has shown that records do exist, with many still in private hands, and it is hoped that this will encourage other researchers to extend the study area to the north,

south, south-west of England and even to Wales and Scotland. This would include areas of monoculture, which this thesis did not set out to address.

With government tinkering around the margins, one wonders what might have happened to farmers had the Second World War not changed the face and fortunes of farming.

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Britain1924: The Return to the Gold Standard

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Richard and Dawn Holmes

Ina and Arnold Lamb

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