Agriculture in Sussex and the Corn Law Lobby

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In Britain during the final decade of the eighteenth century there were widespread reports of failed or deficient harvests accompanied by famine, dysentery, hardship and in some cases actual starvation. The Board of Agriculture called for a report on the state of the harvest in 1795 and for Sussex it was stated that there was a great deficiency with crops less by a quarter on the previous crop.[1] At that time the country was heavily involved in the Napoleonic Wars and the government was in the invidious position of not knowing the state of the annual harvests nor the food stocks available to feed the population. Further harvest disasters in 1799 and 1800 obliged the government to attempt to obtain agricultural information through letters to the clergy issued by the bishops.[2] The results were worded too generally to be of value and the exercise has to be regarded as a failure.

In Sussex in 1800 there were reports of distress from seven localities, in Surrey four and there was famine just across the border in Hampshire.[3] There was a flood of anonymous letters, threats and reports of threatened insurrection, plots and counter-plots and of inflationary prices for food and monopolisation of food stocks. At East Chiltington the incumbent complained that 'the monopoly of small farms by the great farmers is the cause of the dearness of butcher's meat, butter, cheese, etc.'[4] The incumbent of Beckley also referred to monopolisation stating that he wished 'something could be done to stop the monopolisation of farms which is rapidly increasing.'[5] The same point was made at Streat 'the monopoly of farms is the great cause of the dearness of provisions, particularly butchers's meat.'[6] At Glynde, John Ellman sold flour to the poor at a reduced price in 1800.[7]

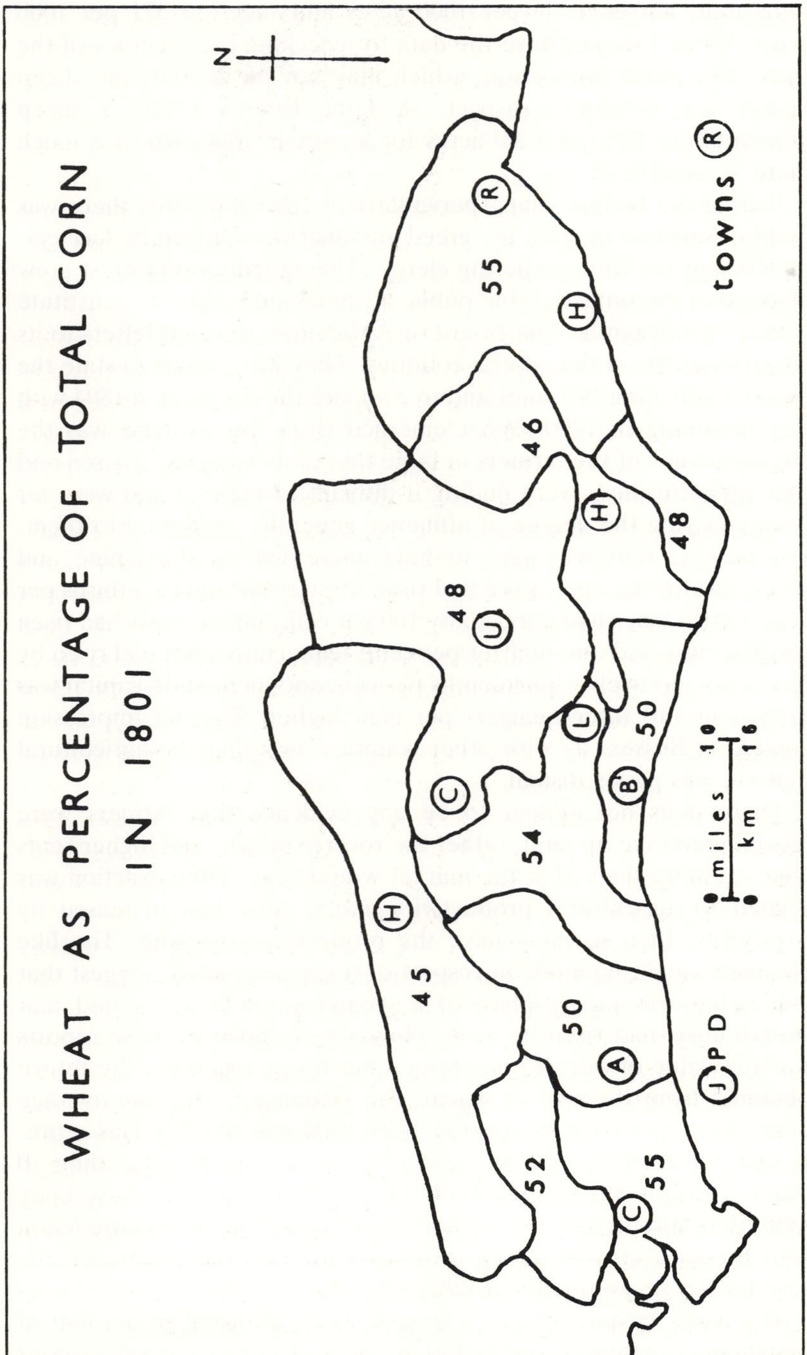
The failure of the harvest of 1800 induced the government to send out pre-printed forms to determine the state of the harvest for 1801. There was a better response to this although the returns were not entirely satisfactory. Many incumbents in Sussex complained of the difficulty in obtaining information with some farmers refusing and with others there was a manifest understatement of the crops planted.

However, the 1801 harvest yielded a bumper crop and the government interest declined for the time being. The completed forms provided information on the acreages of wheat, barley, oats, turnips or rape, which were not separately distinguished, beans, peas and potatoes. The latter were not particularly complete enough to be of much use for the agrarian historian. No information was requested on ley crops nor bare fallow so that the only satisfactory employment of the results is in drawing up a crop ranking of wheat, oats and barley. This is a tedious and time-consuming chore and the results are as shown in Map 1.

What emerges is the interesting fact that throughout Sussex in 1801 wheat occupied over half the combined acreage of wheat, oats and barley. After allowing for the fact that wheat was the cash winter crop and the others represented the Lenten sowing it still exhibits a certain degree of imbalance in the way in which the cropland was managed. The imbalance is further compounded by the fact that for 70 out of 169 parishes barley was almost non-existent as a crop in 1801. Typical examples are 53 acres out of a toal of 856 at Arlington, 43 out of 695 at Ashurst, 21 out of 616 at Beckley, 59 out of 1957 at Billingshurst, 4 out of 488 at Brightling, 16 out of 962 at Burwash, 14 out of 770 at Chailey, 19 out of 796 at Chiddingly, 48 out of 2661 at East Grinstead and so on. At East Blatchington barley took the lead with 39.7% of the recorded acreage, and at Eastbourne 43.5% put barley as the leading crop with oats no more than 16%. At Hardham there were no oats and the acreage was shared more or less equally between wheat and barley. This was also the case at Litlington where oats with 22% occupied third place. At Rumboldswyke, of the cereals acreage of 97, barley occupied 75 acres. Barley also took the lead at South Heighton and West Dean.

In 1803 under the Defence of the Realm Act, counties in southern England were asked to draw up lists of crops, number of livestock, able-bodied labour, mills, bakeries and carts. This was to meet the threat of an anticipated Napoleonic invasion. For the most part only the coastal parishes were invovled, but in Sussex which was held to be most at risk the whole of the county was listed. Only part of the information in considerable detail has survived, but of interest is the fact that similar listings were conducted for Sussex in 1801 and 1798.[8] The totals of grain in May 1798[9] indicated that wheat represented 51%, oats 30%, malt 14%, barley 4%, peas and beans 1% which is in broad agreement with the crop statistics for 1801 discussed earlier.

However, the livestock numbers for 1801 would appear to be an underestimate, possibly because farmers had disposed of stock in anticipation of invasion. Cattle were stocked at 66 per 1000 acres of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Map 1

total area, horses at 24 per 1000 acres and sheep at 371 per 1000 acres. While I do not have the data for checking the accuracy of the cattle and horse population, which may not be far out, the sheep figures are definitely suspect. A later Return yields a sheep population of 925 per 1000 acres for Sussex in 1800, which is much more acceptable.[10]

During the famine years, paricularly in 1800 and 1801, there was great dissatisfaction with the greed and avarice betrayed by farmers, millers and the tithe-gathering clergy. The agricultural interest grew alarmed at the unfavourable public attitude and resolved to institute counter-propaganda. The Board of Agriculture sent out letters to its correspondents in the several counties. They were asked to state the cost of cultivating 100 acres and to compare the situation in 1804 with that obtaining in 1790. What emerged from this exercise was the universal view of the farmers at large that costs had greatly risen and that agriculturalists were finding it difficult to manage and were far from enjoying the degree of affluence generally attributed to them. For Sussex, rent was said to have increased by thirty-nine and seven-twelfths per cent, tithe had risen by sixty-six and two-thirds per cent, parish taxes had gone up by 100 per cent, labour costs had risen by forty-nine and one-quarter per cent, team cultivation had risen by forty-two and twelve-fourteenths per cent and interest on capital was forty-nine and three-quarters per cent higher. The net impression created in Sussex, as with other counties, was that the agricultural outlook was pretty dismal.

There does not appear to be any evidence that farmers were unwilling to take up land, rather the reverse in fact, and higher rents were no more than what the market would bear. Tithe exaction was related to agricultural productivity and if tithe had increased by two-thirds, then so must have the products of the land. The like comment might be made in respect of team costs which suggest that cultivation was taking place at a greater rate. It was stated that overall costs had risen by 39%. However, in none of these reports was the value of outputs mentioned but if one examines the return obtained from the sale of wheat, the evidence is that the average price per quarter for the period 1790–1802 was 65s 7d. This represented a rise of 43.5% on the average price for the preceding 10 years. Thus the 39% rise in overall costs would appear to have been more than matched by the income from wheat. Taken in conjunction with the greater productivity indicated by the tithe payments, the case for depression seems decidedly weak.

The Rev. Arthur Young, writing in 1813, afforded an account of costs for cultivating 100 acres and for productivity in general. Labour averaged 10s 5d per week of 1 shilling per acre, rent for 100 acres was 25 shillings, rates 4 shillings, tithe 2 shillings, Scot was 1s 6d, highways tax 6d in £ and church tax 4d. The overall expenses for 100 acres was £268–1s 6d. Rents varied according to the nature of the land as one would expect. On the Weald some land was 9 shillings per acre but much let at 12 to 20 shillings per acre. Wet sandy land was 7 to 8 shillings per acre and good loamy clay 15 shillings. Arable at the foot of the South Downs fetched 20 to 25 shillings per acre, but waste only 1s to 1s 6d per acre. Sheep walk varied from 1s to 8s 6d, at Lewes it was 2s 6d and arable 10s-6d. Light gravelly soils let at 12s 6d per acre. Thus, any general statement for rent in Sussex is hardly sustainable and one can only discuss regional rents.

It was essential to fallow stiff soils but Young's statement that it required 10 to 12 oxen to plough half an acre a day would seem to infer that the oxen were a pretty feeble breed. Concerning sheep he estimated that there were 341,745 sheep and 113,605 lambs making a total of 455,350. On the South Downs sheep were stocked at one-and-a-half to the acre, in West Sussex one acre would feed 100 ewes and lambs for a week and elsewhere 20 acres would fatten 100 sheep from the beginning of October to the end of March. The Rye Marshes have long been celebrated for their fattening quality and Young stated that 6 ewes per acre could be stocked in summer and 3 per acre in winter. On the question of the return from dairying, the butter yield was 5lbs per week at the height of the season and from 6 cows some 30 to 40lbs of cheese per month could be made. From the Duke of Richmond's dairy the butter yield per cow was some 90lbs in summer, value £4–6s 11½d, and in winter 15 cows for the six months produced 689lbs., value at 11½d per lb., £32–18s 10¾.[11]

During the war years, the returns from growing wheat were such that farmers were eager to acquire land irrespective of its price and in disregard of the interest charged on loans. Charles Western, the spokesman for agriculture in the Commons, stated in 1816 that farmers 'as fast as they could realize or borrow money, they employed it in the purchase or improvement of land; and the facilities for obtaining credit in late years have universally stimulated this practice.'[12] When the war came to an end in 1815 panic quickly set in as financial confidence evaporated and the banks foreclosed on loans whose interest charges the farmers could no longer meet. In the attempt to reduce outgoings farmers discharged staff and cut down on maintenance of their land. The effect of this was to run down farms and ultimately to reduce productivity while as the discharged labour went to swell the total of parish poor and thus increase the poor rate, mainly paid by the agricultural sector, such measures were counter-productive.

As in 1804, the agricultural lobby felt it incumbent to demonstrate the parlous state of agriculture. Thus, the Board of Agriculture issued a 'circular letter to the most opulent and intelligent landholders'[13] in England, Wales and Scotland in 1816. As by their replies the Board recognized that they stood to lose £9 million per annum the tenor of the replies may be anticipated. Some 12 replies were returned in respect of Sussex. Questions were put as to the number of farms unoccupied, those where notice to quit had been given, where rents had been abated, the state of the labouring poor, the effect on the poor rates and what remedies were suggested for alleviating the distress.

J. Newland of Chichester stated that two farms of 800 acres were uncultivated, at Shoreham F. Gell reported one farm of 260 acres unoccupied and H. Fuller of Shoreham noted one other of 200 acres and T.C. Calhoun of Ridgewick said three farms were unoccupied. As to notices to quit, John Ellman of Glynde stated there were a great many, J. Woods of Chilgrove said there were several as did F. Gell of Shoreham. J. Ellman, junior, of Firle noted several and J. Salter of Tittleworth stated that there were a great many. There were said to be many at Shoreham, Rackham, some at Aldworth, one or two at River near Petworth and two at Rudgwick.

Rent abatements were reported from most areas, 20 to 25% at Glynde, 20% at Chichester, 25% at Shoreham and at Hetching, while at Rackham rebates of 25 to 33% were made and there were liberal deductions at Firle. The state of the poor was worse than ever known according to John Ellman and similar reports were made at Tittleworth, Chilgrove and Shoreham. At Chichester there was great distress and a great want of employment was reported for Firle, Aldworth, Rudgwick, Rackham and Hetching.

Several reporters stated that poor rates were higher than in 1812, notably at Glynde, Aldworth and Firle, others said rates were increasing. At Rudgwick, Rackham and Shoreham rates were stationary, while at Hetching the poor rate had decreased. Almost all reporters wanted taxes, tithe and rents reduced, while J. Newland of Chichester, J. Woods of Chilgrove and H. Fuller of Shoreham wanted a government bounty. Others demanded a prohibition of imports of grain.

Thus a mixed bag of troubles, but hardly as desperate as made out for some other counties where bankruptcies, forced sales and dispossession were said to be rife. However, the Report overstretched credulity among the non-agricultural interest and few copies were printed while the printer went bankrupt. In the provincial press the Courier commented, 'It was unwise of the Board to suppress the Report – queries to the landowner were unwisely drawn out. Without intending it, they do tend to produce answers generally in one sense, and that an alarming one. Taken as a mass they would induce any foreigner to believe that the cultivation of the country was in a dreadful state, whereas it was never carried to such a height before. Lands that yielded nothing are now rendered productive – To the questions of the Board, the answers are for the most part gloomy – One effect such inquiries always produce – they always increase the alarm and give rise to a disposition to exaggeration.'[14]

Charles Western confessed that during the last 20 years 'agriculture has certainly advanced with rapid strides – two or three good harvests from this extended and improved agriculture, together with continued import, and demand reduced, have occasioned such a surplus in the market, as very obviously accounts for the first depression of the price. The farmers soon became alarmed and began to experience distress. Their alarm was increased by the rejection of the Corn Bills of 1813 and 1814, and by the apparent determination of the public to resist any measure of that sort, and likewise that the peace would necessarily restore the low prices which existed prior to the war. They felt – that they should soon be hurried into the market and compelled to take any price that was offered.'[15] Thus much of the troubles of the farmers were of their own making. They had over-extended production beyond the capacity of the market to consume the product for the time being. Figure one illustrates the concentration on growing wheat in Sussex. They had gone well beyond the limits of their capacity to repay or to meet the charges for interest on the land they had invested in. By discharging a great part of the labour force they had reduced their capacity to produce arable crops without being able to substitute livestock output and as the 1816 reporters indicate, retribution followed from the increase in the Poor Rates.

'After the initial post-war fall in prices, depression due to low prices was severe and widespread only in two brief periods, 1821 to 1823 when fatstock producers and dairymen were affected as well as grain producers; and in 1833 to 1836, when complaints were confined mainly to arable farms, particularly those on the undrained clays' – 'Between 1815 and 1846 the average prices of wheat, barley and oats all ruled above the pre-war levels, and only in four years out of the 32 did the price of wheat fall below 50 shillings, which in fact had been near the average in the later eighteenth century.'[16]

Each of these periods provided the incentive for the agricultural lobby to highlight the difficulties of farmers by instituting Select Committee Reports on Agricultural Depression. The Reporters at these enquiries were either those who were known keen proponents of agricultural protection or were persons whose occupations or interests, as in the case of bailiffs and land agents, were dependent on the goodwill of landed proprietors. The Committee in 1821 was desirous of showing that even substantial rent abatements were not resolving the problems of farmers, many could not pay rates, there was a rising number of warrants of distress, present wages were being paid out of capital so that the farmers' capital was being decreased, rent was not being paid in some instances, low productivity land would have to be given up and could not be utilised for other purposes, labourers were worse off, and only massive government aid could save farmers.

These were all valuable points for the purposes of propaganda and thus questions were framed so as to elicit the required answers. John Ellman of Glynde in 1821 stated that rent abatements of twenty to twenty-five per cent were made four or five years earlier. Question – 'Do the present prices at which corn is selling, remunerate the farmer for the expense of tillage, poor rates and rent?' 'I am certain they do not, in our neighbourhood, in the county of Sussex.'[17] Question – 'Do you believe that at the present rates of corn, the farmer is remunerated in the expense of tillage, putting all rent out of the question?' 'In some particular farms of good light tillage land, they probably may be remunerated at the present prices without paying any rent; but upon heavy tillage land, I am perfectly confident that at the present prices of agricultural produce, it is totally impossible for the tenants to pay any rent at all, unless they pay it out of the capital.' Question – 'Confining yourself to the county of Sussex, do you believe that the capital of the farmer has decreased?' – 'I can speak positively to my own capital being very considerably decreased; and I have every reason to believe it is so generally throughout the county.'[18]

The argument that the depression was productive of a decrease in the capital of farmers was further supported by the evidence given by John Ellman, junior, of Southover. Question – 'Do you mean the (poor) rates would be increased last year in relation to the preceding year?' 'Yes' 'By the inability of the farmers to employ the men?' 'Exactly; I would state that even supposing they may at present be as well off as in 1813, nothing but an alteration in the Corn Laws can prevent their sinking every day. In our county, Sussex, the wages of a man and his wife and one child in 1813 were 13s a week, his wages are now 9s a week. A man and his wife with two children would formerly have 14s a week, now they have 10s, – but I beg to submit, that it is impossible those prices for wages can continue to be paid, because I am confident they have been paid out of the farmer's capital, instead of his profits; and therefore, it must be exhausted; it cannot last much longer.'[19]

Thomas Barton of Battle stated that 'in the district in which I reside, a district of forty parishes, there are a thousand (labourers) that have no employment that is useful.' Question – 'Can you give any reasons for the number of persons thrown out of employ?' 'Certainly, the inability of farmers to pay them. I have heard an application made to the farmers; and the answer has been uniformly, they could employ them, but they could not find the money to pay them.'[20] Question – 'Have there been many warrants of distress, issued by the Magistrates, on the farmers in that part of the country?' 'Yes; I think more in the last year than I ever knew in four years before.' Question – 'Are the rents pretty well paid?' 'Certainly worse than I ever knew before; the arrears are greater than I ever knew. – There are many instances of farmers who have just now given notice to quit.'[21]

On the question of the inability of the lower yielding land being unable to pay rent, John Ellman stated that the second quality land producing 3 Q. per acre could pay no rent if the price of corn was less than 60 shillings.[22] John Ellman, junior, said that land in Sussex produced 20–24 bushels per acre. The 20 bushel land would go out of cultivation if the price fell below 72 shillings.[23] Question – 'What do you think would be an adequate protecting duty to the farmer on the importation of corn, to enable the farmer to get remunerative prices?' 'I should think on wheat, nothing less than 40s a quarter.'[24]

The protectionist lobby must have found the Sussex evidence most gratifying, although it must be stated that Sussex was far from being exceptional in presenting such views.

In 1828 a House of Lords Committee took evidence on the State of the British Wool Trade. Sussex, with its heavy involvement in sheep farming was much affected by the current distress and two of its leading farmers gave evidence on the effect of the decline in price for South Downs wool.[25] John Ellman of Glynde farmed 1300 to 1400 acres and clipped 1100 sheep annually. He stated that the sheep kept on the South Downs were almost entirely breeding flocks with wethers sold at 6 months old and the ewes at 4 years in a lean state. Thomas Duke of Warning Camp near Arundel farmed 1560 acres consisting of 626 acres or arable, 139 acres meadow, 740 acres of Down, 35 acres of wood and the rest waste. His sheep were stocked at one to the acre and he clipped 1600 South Downs annually. He sold 400 ewes and 800 lambs yearly.

Both reporters considered a flock was essential for a down farm and Ellman stated, 'I do not see the way in which a certain portion of the arable lands can be manured, but from the sheep, where it lies at such a distance from the farm yard as to make carting of manure too expensive.'[26] Each said that without the sheep the down land would have to go out of cultivation. The price of South Down wool declined from 1s 6d per lb in 1824 to 1 shilling, and in 1827 to 9d with many farmers unable to sell at that price. It was generally agreed by these and reporters from other counties that the remunerative price had to be 1s 6d per lb. Many farmers had large stocks of wool in hand because they adhered to the practice of withholding supplies from the market until price levels suited them. However, with prices falling to 6d or 8d per lb this was an unremunerative policy.

The demand from the West Riding woollen manufacturers had changed and the South Downs wool was no longer required, the trade being supplied by imported wool. Unfortunately this was something which had not got home to the graziers of Southern England. Most stated it was not possible to change to other breeds. Ellman said Leicesters could not cope with the short grass of the South Downs. Obviously if wool could not be sold at a remunerative price and if cultivation of the arable for wheat was dependent on sheep grazing the land, then the only policy was to change course and make the fattening of sheep for the meat market the basic sheep interest.

There was a further Select Committee instituted in 1833–36 to take Evidence on Agricultural Distress. For Sussex, Samuel Goodman of Hurst Pierpoint, Thomas Boniface of Climping near Littlehampton, Joseph Freeland from near Chichester and John Ellman of Glynde were called to report in 1836.

Various minor causes were attributed to the aggravation of the 1836 Depression in farming. These included the unrestricted importation of Irish oats which adversely affected the price of home-grown oats, while the poor yield of barley was due to the dry summer of 1835. There had been sheep rot in 1828 occasioned by farmers putting sheep on wet ground, particularly where the springs from the South Downs broke out. It was agreed that this should not have taken place. However, Ellman considered that flocks were as numerous as in the period before the rot took place.[27] The rot did not contribute to the high price of mutton prevailing in 1836. Question – 'It is your opinion that the present high price of mutton is not owing rather to the deficiency of the turnip crop?' 'I consider it entirely due to that.'[28]

The major cause of the depression in prices was due to the great crops of the last three years.[29] There had been a great increase in wheat on the clay lands and immense crops had been yielded in the last two years.[30] Boniface stated that the crops since and including 1832 had been above average and that more wheat was sown in the autumn of 1835 than in previous years despite the low prices.[31]

What farmers were really complaining about was the run of fine seasons which were productive of high yields of wheat. Although these allegedly were responsible for the distress in farming it was apparent that there was no deficiency in cash liquid resources. This was made implicit in the reports by several of those giving evidence that as late as March 1836 the wheat crop had not been threshed nor much of that for the harvest of 1835.[32] Nor were farmers reluctant to take on farms. Boniface said that many farms were out of lease in his district but there was no difficulty in obtaining tenants.[33] Another reporter stated that he would be ready to take on more land.[34]

All reporters were of the opinion that the new Poor Law had improved conditions by bringing down the poor rate. The price of stock had been remunerative[35] and rents had been reduced since 1830.[36] However, all claimed that farmers were in a bad way. 'Are you acquainted with a considerable tract of country – so as to state what the condition of the farmers is?' '– generally speaking it is very poor, they have very little ready money, and scarcely sufficient means to carry on their farms; I think it is a general complaint amongst the whole of us.'[37] 'Are the farmers in a bad state?' 'I think they are.' 'Are the prices sufficient to afford them a remuneration?' 'Decidedly not.'[38] Joseph Freeland describing conditions near Chichester was asked, 'Have you been farming that land to a profit the last three years?' 'No, to a very considerable loss.' 'Did not sinking farmers hang to the farming occupation long after they were productive, until they were absolutely ruined in hopes of better times and a rise in the value of their capital?' 'Exactly.'[39]

It will be observed that the protectionist cause was materially being advanced by the introduction of leading questions.[40] As in the case of earlier Reports of Select Committees on Agricultural Depression evidence was sought to show that farmers could not pay their way, they were using up their capital and appreciable government support was needed to bolster prices. James Hudson was asked, 'Is it impossible the farmers can, at the present price of corn, pay the expenses of agriculture?' and replied, 'it is impossible.'[41] 'Can farmers go on at the present rate?' 'No, not at the present prices.' Quite often the same question was put by different members of the Committee so as to stress a particular reply. Thomas Boniface was asked, 'Have the poor rates increased in consequence of the incapability of the farmers to employ the labourers?' 'Certainly.' 'Has that incapability arisen from the fall in prices?' 'In a great degree.'[42]

Farmers were living on their capital according to the replies made to questions put on this point. Question – 'The capital is reduced now, is it not?' 'It is reduced now.' 'Taking the present wages of labourers, do you think they are paid out of the profits of the farmer?' 'No.' 'Do you think they are paid out of his capital?' 'Certainly.'[43] 'If the labourer is now depending for his wages not upon the profits of the farmer, but upon his capital, do you think that is a state of things likely to continue?' 'No, it appears to me it will not continue.'[44]

John Ellman stated that wheat could not be grown at a profit at 5s 6d a bushel[45] while Samuel Goodman asserted that the average price for a farmer to live was about 60 shillings a quarter.[46] James Hudson thought that the lowest remunerative price was 56 shillings a quarter,[47] which was confirmed by Joseph Freeland.[48] All these points duly went into print and were employed to support the case for continued agricultural protection. However, one can hardly believe that non-agricultural interests would believe that three years of very productive harvests with low prices but high yields could reduce farmers to such a state of near insolvency as was claimed.

The success of the Anti-Corn Law League stimulated the protectionists to organize themselves by setting up a national committee to which county committees adhered. The Sussex Society for the Protection of Agriculture and British Industry was formed in 1844 with the Duke of Richmond as president. James Wood of Brighton was chairman and among the Committee members was John Ellman,[49] previously noted as a supporter of protection. In Parliament the Duke was a constant speaker in support of protection although his sympathies were somewhat one-sided. The farmers should be protected at any cost but the labourers could go to the wall, 'farmers were obliged to employ even more men than they really wanted. Before establishing free trade this state of things should be got rid of. If the Legislature was determined to make corn cheap, the farmers should be enabled to get their labour at the cheapest possible rate. He knew that lowering the wages of the labourers would be most repugnant to their feelings; but still the circumstances should be taken into consideration.[50]

Despite widespread support by Sussex agriculturalists as indicated by a Committee of 42 members, the Sussex Society in common with other Agricultural Protection Societies, was unable to rouse sufficient Parliamentary support to prevent the passage of the Repeal of the Corn Laws. In Berkshire, Philip Pusey stated that the battle was lost, 'I have told the farmers that we are beaten, and that protection, even if any protection could be retained would never more be of any use to them'.[51] However, the die-hards of Sussex persisted in their belief that the situation could be restored. The Committee stated in 1847, 'A General Election is at hand. – Upon the result of that election will unquestionably depend the existence of all laws for the Protection of Agriculture, and it will therefore be the solemn and bounden duty of all Agriculturalists to rise as one man, and return to Parliament only such persons as are prepared to maintain the principle of Protection to British Industry.'[52]

With the failure of such hopes attention switched to the plight of farmers once more and a further Select Committee in 1848 took evidence on Agricultural Customs. The consideration in this context was the right of outgoing tenants to unexhausted improvements. The generality of holdings in the Weald of Sussex were of yearly tenancies although some reporters had leases. Bare summer fallows were still the rule in the Weald although it was agreed that draining and the institution of green crops would much reduce costs. Four ploughings at 10s–14s an acre each were applied to fallow land.[53]

Jeremiah Smith of Rye said that in cases where landlords compensated tenants for application of manures, farming was greatly improved. Typical manures were the application of rape cake, nitrate of soda, rags and guano. He had drained his land and although he paid an increased rent he considered that he had been well remunerated for the improvement.[54] To the north of Rye towards Maidstone it was said that drainage of the Weald was a recent development but agriculture had improved considerably in the last few years.[55]

It is clear that farmers had long been improving their land by draining done at their own expense. Benefit from this had accrued increased yields. In 1836 Samuel Goodman had under-drained at a cost of £2 15s 0d an acre and had also employed the unemployed labour of the parish generally in drainage projects.[56] Great improvements through drainage of the clay lands were recorded as early as 1823–1829.[57] Joseph Freeland had likewise drained land at his own expense between 1829 and 1836.[58] John Smith commenced draining in 1835 and stated that the land produced three times the yield by 1848 and that he employed six times the number of men.[59]

What is of significance is the fact that belying the contentions that farmers were in such distress from the lower prices concomitant on three productive harvests as asserted in the 1836 Report, is the evidence that all the time up to 1848 they were laying out resources to improve the land and in so doing to raise their income through higher yields. The claims that they had to discharge labour and could not pay rents while the poor rates fell into arrears and capital was being consumed for such expenses as profits did not suffice, were designed to bolster the case for protection but appear to have fallen short of reality. Support for a different attitude towards farming practice is afforded by the evidence that the principles of high farming were beginning to be accepted. Thus Thomas Boniface fattened his sheep on corn and cake for sale to the London market,[60] and James Hudson kept part of his flock on oats and fed the working oxen on oil cake.[61] Other features of high farming such as the employment of rape cake, nitrate of soda and guano, reported in 1848, had changed the traditional notion of manures.[62] The depressed view of the Wool Trade presented in 1828 does not appear to have forced producers out of business, while John Ellman in 1836 had already been able to break into the French market.

There were problems of course. On estates in the lower Ouse Valley there were 'short-term problems with rents received, accumulation of arrears and granting of rebates for the first time since the 1820s. A few surviving rentals for these and other estates indicate that generally rents rose until the later 1850s when the pattern of the 1840s was repeated.'[63] The fact that rents had not been reduced since the 1820s tends to underline the view that conditions for the Sussex farmer had not been as desperate as the reports to the Select Commissions had made out. Thus although all the required answers for the protection lobby were made from 1804 onwards, the Sussex farmer had gone on his way employing his capital to effect improvements to the land he rented and to increase his income through higher yields.

Notes

[1] *Annals of Agriculture*, XXIV, 329, 1795
[2] PRO HO Domestic Papers, 42153, 1800
[3] PRO HO 42/53/204 HO 42/52/375, 1800
[4] PRO HO 67/7/10, 1801
[5] PRO HO 67/7/86, 1801
[6] PRO HO 67/7/2, 1801
[7] Sue Farrant 'John Ellman of Glynde in Sussex' *Agricultural History* Review 26 11 85 1978
[8] G.H. Kenyon, 'The Civil Defence and Livestock Returns for Sussex in 1801' *Sussex Archaeological Collection* 89, 1950, 57–84
[9] Supra, 61.
[10] BPP. *Select Committee on the State of the Wool Trade*, Minutes of Evidence 1828, 233
[11] Rev. Arthur Young, *General View of the Agriculture of the County of Sussex* (1813), pp. 27–28, 68, 111–112, 157–373.
[12] Charles Western, 'Report of speech reprinted in *English Historical Documents* XI, 1783–1832 (1959), 483.
[13] Board of Agriculture. *The Agricultural State of the Kingdom in February, March and April 1816*, London (1816), reprinted by Charles Clement (Strand).
[14] *Salopian Journal* 11 September 1816.
[15] Charles Western, op. cit., 482.

[16] J.D. Chambers and G.E. Mingy, *The Agricultural Revolution 1750–1880*, 1966, 127–8.

[17] *Report of Select Committee on the Depressed State of Agriculture*, 1821 Evidence of John Ellman, 49–50.

[18] Supra, evidence of John Ellman, 51.

[19] S.C. 1821, Evidence of John Ellman junior, 120–21.

[20] Supra, Evidence of Thomas Barton, 95.

[21] *Ibid*. Evidence of Thomas Barton, 95, 97.

[22] S.C. 1821, Evidence of John Ellman, 55.

[23] Supra, Evidence of John Ellman junior, 111.

[24] *Ibid*. Evidence of John Ellman junior, 117.

[25] Wool Trade, op. cit., 1828, 33–103.

[26] Supra, 33.

[27] *Report of Select Committee on Agriculture Distress 1836*, Evidence of John Ellman Q 4534.

[28] Supra, Evidence of John Ellman Q 4616.

[29] *Ibid*., Evidence of James Hudson Q 3391.

[30] *Ibid*., Evidence of John Ellman Qs 4508–9.

[31] *Ibid*., Evidence of Thomas Boniface Qs 13149, 13207.

[32] *Ibid*., Evidence of John Ellman Q 4580.

[33] *Ibid*., Evidence of Thomas Boniface Q 13137.

[34] *Ibid*., Evidence of Samuel Goodman Q 11041.

[35] *Ibid*., Evidence of Thomas Boniface Q 13151.

[36] *Ibid*., Evidence of Thomas Boniface Q 13155.

[37] *Ibid*., Evidence of Samuel Goodman Q 11016.

[38] *Ibid*., Evidence of James Hudson Qs 3375, 3378.

[39] *Ibid*., Evidence of Joseph Freeland Qs 14799, 14957.

[40] Lest it be thought that I am over desirous to assert the influence of the protectionist lobby in these Reports, I would say that my impressions arise from study of the Reports over many years and many times during which I have studied thousands of pages for the whole country.

[41] *Select Committee*, Evidence of James Hudson Q 3390.

[42] *Ibid*., Evidence of Thomas Boniface Qs 13178–9.

[43] *Ibid*., Evidence of Joseph Freeland Qs 14847–8.

[44] *Ibid*., Evidence of Thomas Boniface Q 13172.

[45] *Ibid*., Evidence of John Ellman Q 4689.

[46] *Ibid*., Evidence of Samuel Goodman Q 11067.

[47] *Ibid*., Evidence of James Hudson Q 3412.

[48] *Ibid*., Evidence of Joseph Freeland Q 14929.

[49] East Sussex Record Office Ref. SHR 2993–3014 regarding the Sussex Agricultural Protection Society (1845).

[50] *Hansard* debate on the Repeal of the Corn Laws January 29, 1846, Speech by Duke of Richmond 352.

[51] N. McCond, The Anti-Corn Law League (1958), Letter by Philip Pusey 199.

[52] *Third Annual Report* of Committee of Management of the Sussex Society for the Protection of Agriculture and British Industry Brighton, 21 January 1847.

[53] *Select Committee on Agricultural Customs*, 1848, Evidence of Thomas Boniface Qs 7021 and 7125.

[54] Supra, Evidence of Jeremiah Smith Qs 5089, 5097, 5105, 5185.

[55] Supra, Evidence of W. Barnes Qs 6659, 6671.

[56] *Select Committee 1836*, Evidence of Samuel Goodman Qs 11050, 11010.

[57] Supra, Evidence of Thomas Boniface Q 13144.

[58] Supra, Evidence of Joseph Freeland Qs 14794–96.

[59] *Select Committee 1848*, Evidence of John Smith Q 5185.

[60] *Select Committee 1836*, Evidence of Thomas Boniface Q 13191.

[61] Supra, Evidence of James Hudson Q 3444.

[62] *Select Committee 1848* Evidence of Jeremiah Smith Q 5089.

[63] Sue Farrant, 'Four estates in the lower Ouse Valley 1840–1920', *Southern History* 1 158–9.