

Whilst researching Edward Hilder, I came across this fascinating and detailed article from the Gardeners' Chronicle and Agricultural Gazette of the 23rd January 1864 (pages 52 - 53).

Because of its size, I thought it best not to include it in my general article on Mr Hilder, but to present it here as an additional file.

Who the article was written by is not stated, but they clearly admired Mr Hilder more than they did the dreary and gloomy waste of Woking Common!

THERE is not a drearier waste than Woking Common within the limits of the island. A black sand, white and yellow six inches below the surface, which is covered with a stunted growth of Ling, and here and there a Furze bush, offers the very poorest promise to the agriculturist. And yet close upon the edge of this waste, gradually winning way within it, lies a farm whose produce averages close on 5 quarters of Wheat per acre, more than 6 quarters of Barley, and more than 30 tons of Mangel Wurzel.

Riding as we did last Friday along the very edge of the moor, then looming black, indefinite, and gloomy through the mist of a cold damp January day, nothing could exceed the contrast presented on this farm by the bushy green luxuriant plant of Rye, the clean fallows covered with piles of Mangel Wurzel, earthed over from the frost, and the thin but uniform and healthy plant of Wheat already well flattened down for tillering in the early spring, all of which are separated merely by the hedge from the utter worthlessness, and, but for the obvious facts beneath our feet, the hopeless sterility of the waste close by.

This contrast, which must be even greater at almost any other season of the year, is wholly a work of Art. And in its history we have one of the best lessons which English agriculture offers to the cultivator of light land.

Of course the difference between the Common and the cultivated land is not the work or growth of

yesterday. Hoe Bridge Farm has, for the most part, been long enclosed and cultivated. Close by it stands the mansion built by JAMES THE FIRST, they say, for a favourite of the Court; and the "Banquet House Field," next to it, taking its name from those times, seems to put back the original enclosure to centuries ago. But within the farm, on what is now one of its most fertile spots, stands almost in ruins the slender column which then served as a land lighthouse to guide the traveller across the moor. And there is enough of evidence not only upon the gradually retreating edge of the waste, but over the whole farm which here abuts upon it, to show how the poor sandy wilderness of one century becomes the fertile field of the next.

Of course the increased productiveness of this land is not the gradual growth of centuries when it is held by men of the energy and intelligence of the present tenant of the Hoe Bridge Farm. Mr. HILDER has added greatly to its fertility during the 16 years he has occupied it under Earl ONSLOW. And it is to his unusually vigorous prosecution of the plans by which light land may everywhere be fertilised, and by which it has been made so productive here, that we have now to call attention. On land originally poor, great crops of Wheat and Barley are now grown—and nowhere is the necessary connection between a great head of stock and a great growth of grain more strikingly illustrated. The land altogether in Mr. HILDER's hands is about 500 acres in extent, of which about 360 lie upon the edge of the moor. On this small light sandy farm a herd of 50 to 70 cows is milked for the London market, a dry flock of Hampshire sheep, varying from 200 to 400 head, is fed, and hogs ranging in number from 1000 to 2000 have been fattened annually up to an average weight of 10 or 12 scores a piece. Add to these, which are the principal points in the management of the business, that 16 to 18 farm horses are employed in cultivation and carriage, and that the labour bill varies between 1000*l.* and 1100*l.* per annum, and it is plain that we have here a very remarkable specimen of vigorous and liberal farm management.

It is now seven or eight years since Mr. HILDER commenced the pig feeding, which has since been one of the chief features of his farming. The sheds and barns of a characteristic Surrey home-stead have been divided into pens 10 to 15 feet square, in each of which 6 to 8 hogs are kept. The food is three times a day put in their troughs, as much as they will at once eat up; and straw, thrown in among them, is trodden down on the box-feeding plan, the whole being cleaned out when 3 or 4 feet deep. The pigs are purchased in various parts of the country (being generally delivered by the London and South-Western Railway at the Woking Station). They average from 5 to 7 scores' weight when bought. Barley, spoiled Wheat, Indian Corn, Peas, Beans, Buckwheat, and Lentils, purchased in Mark Lane, are brought down to Woking, ground and mixed in the proportion of one-half Barley meal, and the remainder mingled and varied according as the market prices guide their purchase. The food is prepared in large tubs upon the barn floor, to which water is laid on. It is given fresh and fresh, not allowed to sour; and in a thin uncooked porridge it is served out to all alike at the average rate of half a peck of meal per head daily. Three men do the whole work of feeding and keeping 500 hogs, which has been the usual number on hand at a time. The average growth of pork or bacon is 1 stone (8 lbs.) a week each. They are kept till fit for the butcher, from three to four or even five months, according to the condition in which they had been bought. The last weeks in the fattening process, when they sleep and rest most, are the most profitable. And when ready for the market they are sent by truck to wholesale bacon curers in many parts of the country; large numbers going into Gloucestershire to the manufactory of Messrs. HILLIER & SON, near Nailsworth, lately described in these columns. So long as the carcass is worth near 6*d.* per lb., and the meal can be bought between 7*l.* and 8*l.* per ton, the business yields a moderate profit, independently of the manure, which on so large a scale of rich feeding is very valuable. But, on the other hand, disease has occasionally destroyed all profit. During the past autumn, for example, an attack prevailed which when suffered to pursue its course proved generally fatal in a few days, the result of disease both in the lungs and in the stomach, which destroyed large numbers, and put a stop almost entirely to the

feeding. And the number now on hand would be still further reduced on this account, but for the need of maintaining a connection with the trade. The disease has now ceased its ravages, but were it not for the need or advantage of keeping up a connection with regular customers, Mr. HILDER would have stopped his pig feeding altogether until his premises should be considered wholly fresh and free from any taint. In the mean time nothing can be kept neater or cleaner than the gangways, boxes, sties, and every separate part of the old standing in which all these operations are carried on.

Another great business on the farm is the cow-keeping. A herd varying from 50 to 70 in number is kept as long as they continue productive— young cows of all kinds, but chiefly smallish horned cows, being bought in Suffolk markets. They are milked twice a day—the evening's meal being sent up by the mail train in time for London breakfasts. They come to calve at all times of the year, so that the produce of milk does not vary materially from one month to another. And an average yield is about 10 quarts a day—this being made up of such maxima as 25 and even 30 quarts a day in a few rare cases, with the larger number of moderate and inferior milkers dwindling to the time when they will be dry before calving. The price realised is 2*d.* per quart upon the farm after all the risks and expenses of conveyance are covered. The cows are fed just now on Mangel Wurzel, grains, Cotton-seed cake (rough), pollards, Wheat chaff, and hay. During summer they are at Grass, and receive grains and cake in addition. The rough (not decorticated) cake is found to answer almost as well as the Linseed cake previously given. From 4 to 6 lbs. of the cake, 14 peck of pollards and as much Wheat chaff, about 3 pecks of brewers' grains, 1 cwt. of cut Mangel Wurzel, and 5 or 6 lbs. of hay, make up the liberal daily ration at present.

The sale of milk, in this way generally profitable, is often made a loss by the attacks of foot and mouth disease. The herd is replenished as often as required by purchased cows, and it is rarely that any fresh additions are made in this way without bringing this great cattle plague along with them. The herd is now comfortably housed in half-closed sheds and yards, being supplied with water when required. Four men, a boy, and two women feed and clean and milk from 50 to 70 cows.

Of course with such an immense live stock to feed and bed, the purchases, always of food and often of straw, are very large. Grain and cake and meal, equal to 500 or 600 and sometimes 1000 bushels a week, are brought on to the farm. And the return of meat is correspondingly large. Taking the flock of fattening sheep into the account, and supposing that 300 make 40 lbs. of mutton each—that in a favourable year 1500 hogs make 100 lbs. of bacon each—that 50 cows make 800 gallons of milk each, and putting the gallon of milk as equal in feeding value to 1 lb. of meat—we have here a produce in animal food of 200,000 lbs. a year on a farm of 500 acres—a manufacture of 400 lbs. of meat per acre—probably quite unparalleled.

Of course it is made possible only by the large quantities of food bought on to it, purchased in Mark Lane and elsewhere. But on the other hand, the immense quantities of rich manure thus made on the farm, are increasing its productiveness not only of cattle food, but also of grain crops. The land is cropped for the most part on the four-field course—but Barley is sometimes taken after Wheat—and Clover is taken only with half the Barley crop, the other half of the Barley stubble being generally put to Peas. Wheat stubbles are also sown down sometimes with Rye or Trifolium, followed by Turnips—or with Rape followed by Peas and Turnips, or they are deeply ploughed, manured, and then shallow-ploughed, and followed by Barley.

It is the practice, for all root crops, to plough deeply with four horses in the autumn. And all the land thus gets a furrow about 12 inches deep every other year. The steam-plough has been hired—and has worked the steepest and most uneven slopes upon the farm with ease. From 12*s.* to 15*s.*, and in one case to 30*s.* per acre, along with the provision of coal and water, has been paid. The last being a case of subsoiling, where two furrows only were worked at a time.

Returning to the subject of crop cultivation: 5 to 6 pecks of Wheat, 7 pecks of Barley, 8 to 9 pecks of Peas, are the ordinary seedling per acre. White Velvet-ear, Talavera, and Suffolk white Wheats; Chevalier and long-eared Nottingham

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THE GARDENERS' CHRONICLE AND AGRICULTURAL GAZETTE.

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Barleys; Early Dun hog Peas; Long Red and Orange Globe Mangel, (the seed grown and saved at home) are the sorts grown. They were covering in Peas already sown, and elsewhere ploughing 12 inches deep a Wheat stubble for Mangel Wurzel last Friday. The week's frost had enabled the clearance of all the pigsties and cow-yards—and the manure was lying in heaps already for the most part spread over the deeply ploughed Wheat stubbles ready to be lightly covered in for Barley or Mangel Wurzel. The Mangel heaps, 9 or 10 feet wide, thickly covered up to the ridge lines with earth, these being thatched, lay along the road sides near the cow sheds, or they lay in small conical piles scattered over the field where they grew, and close by the Rye fields, on both of which they were to be fed by folded sheep. In this case they are thrown, leaves and all together, untouched by the knife, and they come out dry and sweet. From 50 to 60 acres of Mangels are annually grown. Their cultivation and manuring is as liberal as possible; 20 to 30 cartloads of dung are ploughed in, and 3 or 4 cwt. of mixed guano and salt are applied per acre, and the seed is drilled on the flat in rows about 33 inches apart.

In this way, notwithstanding the cold weather of the last three or four summers, great crops have been grown. And in good years 40 to 50 tons per acre, ascertained by weighing a few perches here and there, have been obtained. The crop is of course less in cold wet summers, for here, but still more in the case of the grain crops, the cultivator, notwithstanding all his efforts, is dependent on the season. Off the hundred acres of Wheat which are annually grown, 1000 sacks for sale are expected and generally obtained. This year, from such threshing as has yet been done, the yield promises to be considerably greater; last year, with the land in quite as good condition, the yield did not exceed 26 bushels per acre. And the variation in the yield of Barley is just as great.

With the immense yield of rich farm-yard manure at his command, Mr. HILDER is gradually feeling his way towards an extension of his farm within the moor. The Gorse is pulled up; and the Ling and Heather turned under by the plough. All that is brought up by the harrows is burned, and the land, then dressed with ashes, with soapers' waste, with lime, or left undressed, is sown with Turnips. A poor crop is the result; best, however, where the soapers' waste has been used. Sheep are being folded on the land—receiving Cotton-cake and hay—and with a dressing of dung upon the sheep-fold the land will soon be fit for some more valuable crop.

It is chiefly by very deep ploughing, and by heavy dressings of rich farm-yard dung, and by the sheep-fold, and by the application of artificial manure, that the land is raised and kept up to the high mark of its fertility. There is not here, as there is in the light land districts of Norfolk, a calcareous marl immediately beneath the surface with which to improve both the texture and the composition of the soil. Fertility has been all along and is still almost wholly artificial, depending less here than probably anywhere in the country upon the natural resources of the land. It is a fact of very great agricultural importance that in a case so entirely artificial, the result should have been fairly remunerative.

The neatness, cleanliness, orderliness of the whole farm and its management, show that good business capacity has had a great deal to do with this success. And the Hoe Bridge Farm, no doubt one of many such examples, is a proof that our best illustrations of agricultural energy, efficiency and success, do not exist among the speakers and the writers upon agriculture, whose names everybody knows—but among the less pretentious men who are rarely heard of beyond the limits of their well conducted business.

The article adds considerably to our knowledge of farming in the Woking area in the mid 19th century, just as the waste of Woking Common was being taken over for houses, rather than sheep.

The 1861 census¹ noted that Mr Hilder farmed 554 acres (rising to 870 acres by 1871²), so the article is a little short when it notes that 'the land altogether in Mr Hilder's hands is about 500 acres in extent', but its mention of 'a herd of 50 to 70 cows' and 'a dry flock of Hampshire sheep, varying from 200 to 400 head' – ties in with the sale of '53 prime beasts' and '400 fat sheep' a reported in July 1870³.

Again we know from the 1861 census that Mr Hilder then employed 23 men and 12 boys, but this article adds to our knowledge with the detail that the 'labour bill varied between £1,000 and £1,100 per annum'.

It also notes that it took 'four men, a boy, and two women', to feed, clean and milk from 50 to 70 cows, and that '16 to 18 farm horses are employed in the cultivation and carriage' of the farm.

The most interesting aspect of this article, however, is the detail it goes into on the day-to-day running of the business – especially the rearing of pigs (which is not hinted at in any of the other newspapers examined), and whilst the report in June 1872⁴ gives some idea of prices, this report goes into much more detail of the value (and costs) of both animals and crops..

Mr Hilder was evidently quite a forward thinking man.

¹ TNA RG9/424/117/12

² TNA RG10/807/67/34

³ Surrey Advertiser, Saturday 9th July 1870, page 5

⁴ Maidstone Journal and Kentish Advertiser, Saturday 22nd June 1872, page 2