

SOME FIELDS AND FARMS IN MEDIEVAL KENT

By ALAN R. H. BAKER

'Of all the features that go to make up the face of any English country parish, the pattern of its fields strikes me as the most puzzling. Why are fields the shapes and sizes that they are? And is the present-day pattern old, fairly old, or quite recent?'

A Correspondent, *The Times* (19th January, 1962), 12f.

THE fabric of the Kentish countryside shows some contrasting patterns. The landscape of East Kent seems to have been woven on a broad loom: its large fields and wire fences combine with a virtual absence of woodland to give it an open, extroverted appearance (Plate IA). The landscape of the Weald, on the other hand, seems to have been embroidered in minute detail: its small fields and numerous, wide hedges combine with abundant woods and coppices to give it an enclosed, introverted appearance (Plate IB). From the crest of the North Downs escarpment these two views are one: in the foreground the expansive landscape of the Vale of Holmesdale reflects in miniature that of East Kent and beyond is the more confined landscape of the Ragstone Ridge and the Weald (Plate IIA). These subjective mid-twentieth century impressions are confirmed in the objective late-eighteenth century drawings of the surveyors engaged in producing the first edition Ordnance Survey maps of Kent (Figs. 1-3).

Seventeenth century estate maps also reveal that fields to the north of the chalk escarpment were generally twice as large as those in the Weald. More specifically, fields in East Kent were more than three times the size of those in the Low Weald (i.e. the Weald Clay Vale) Fields in Holmesdale and the High Weald were larger than those in the Low Weald although they were still only about half the size of those of East Kent. There were regional variations, too, in the shapes and boundaries of fields: the most striking contrast was between small, irregularly shaped, hedged fields of the Weald and large, more rectangular, often unenclosed fields of East Kent. Estate maps also reveal the existence of 'open fields,' i.e. fields subdivided into intermixed and unenclosed parcels. But field and rural settlement patterns of Kent in the seventeenth century differed little from those of the late-eighteenth



A. A view in East Kent, of fields to the southwest of Eastry.



B. A view in the Weald, looking north across the valley of the Kent Water near Tunbridge Wells.



A. A view across the Vale of Holmesdale, looking south from the North Downs escarpment near Wrotham towards the High Weald.



[Photo by J. K. St. Joseph. Crown Copyright Reserved

B. A view across Romney Marsh, looking northwest from New Romney. The marshland landscape, with its fenced and ditched fields and scarcity of hedges and trees, is the most open and exposed in Kent. Its fields and farms receive no consideration here because of their singular history of reclamation.

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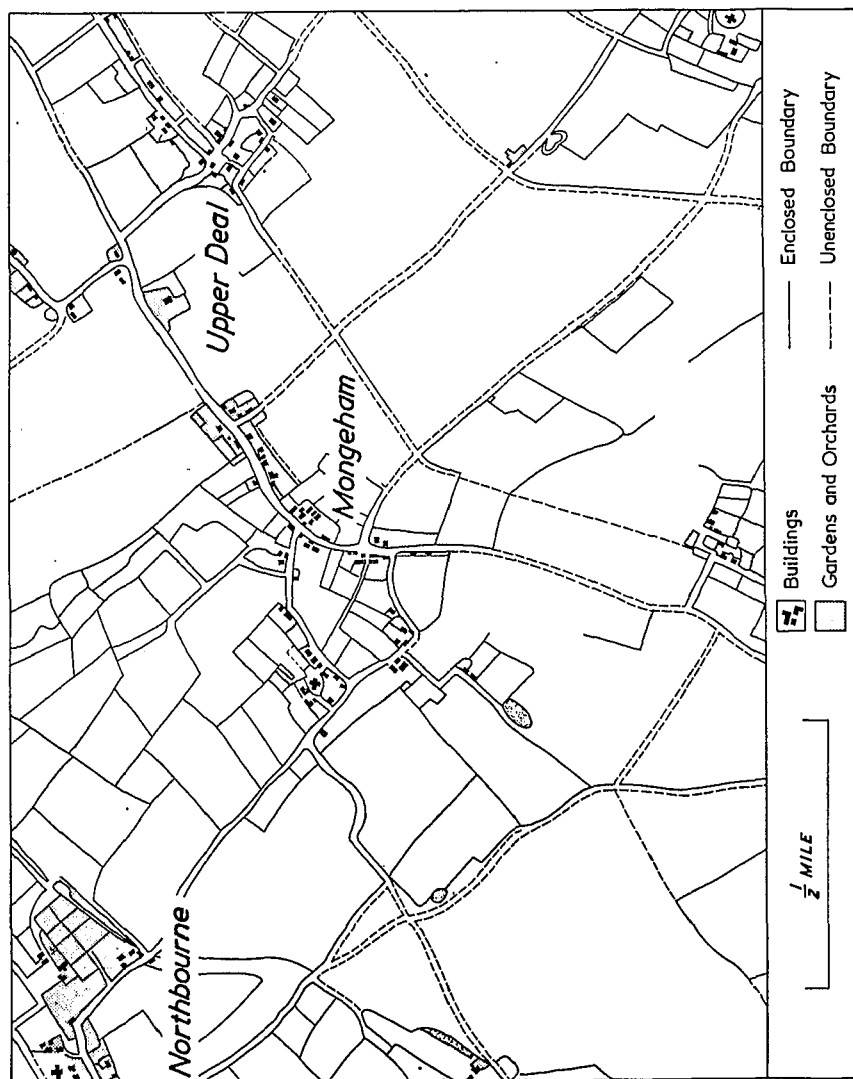


FIG. 1. Some field patterns in East Kent, 1799.
Source: BM Ordnance Surveyors' Drawings (Portfolio 17, Sheet 107).

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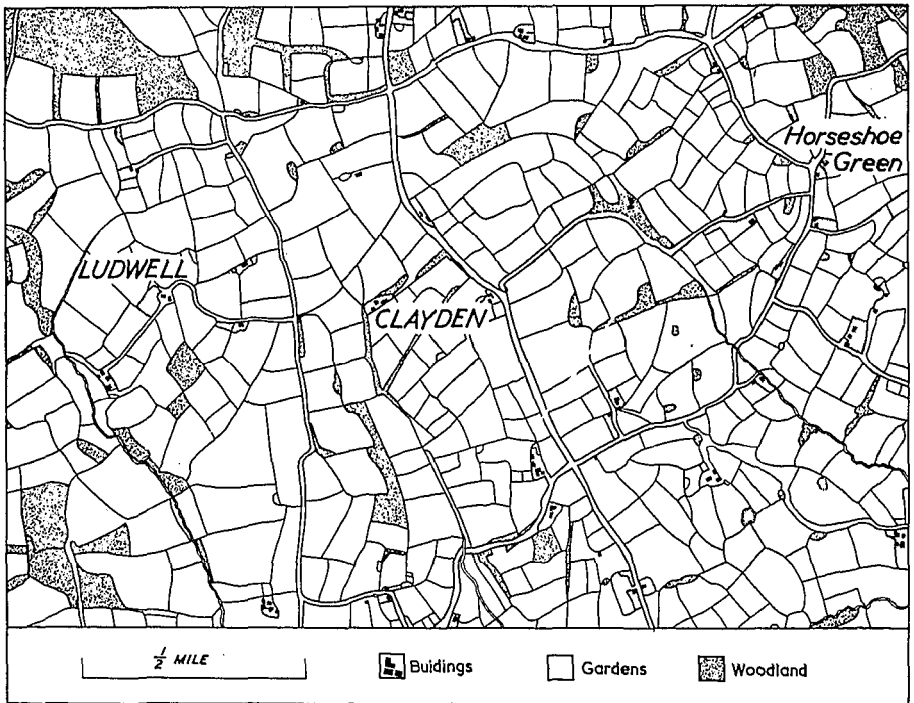


FIG. 2. Some field patterns in the Weald, 1799.

Source: BM Ordnance Surveyors' Drawings (Portfolio 5, Sheet 100).

or indeed of the mid-twentieth century. The origins of the present rural landscape are to be sought beyond 1600.¹

THE PATTERN OF SETTLEMENTS

A precise picture of rural settlement and field patterns in the middle ages is, in the absence of estate maps, unobtainable but a partial picture can be derived from numerous and varied, but often fragmentary and intractable, verbal sources.² It will be the contention of this paper, based upon analysis of some of this material, that Kentish rural settlement and field patterns were already by the beginning of the fourteenth

¹ A. R. H. Baker, 'Some early Kentish estate maps and a note on their portrayal of field boundaries,' *Arch. Cant.*, 77 (1962), 177-184 and 'Field patterns in seventeenth-century Kent,' *Geography*, 59 (1965), 18-30.

² H. C. Darby, 'An Historical Geography of England: twenty years after,' *Geographical Journal*, 126 (1960), 147-169.

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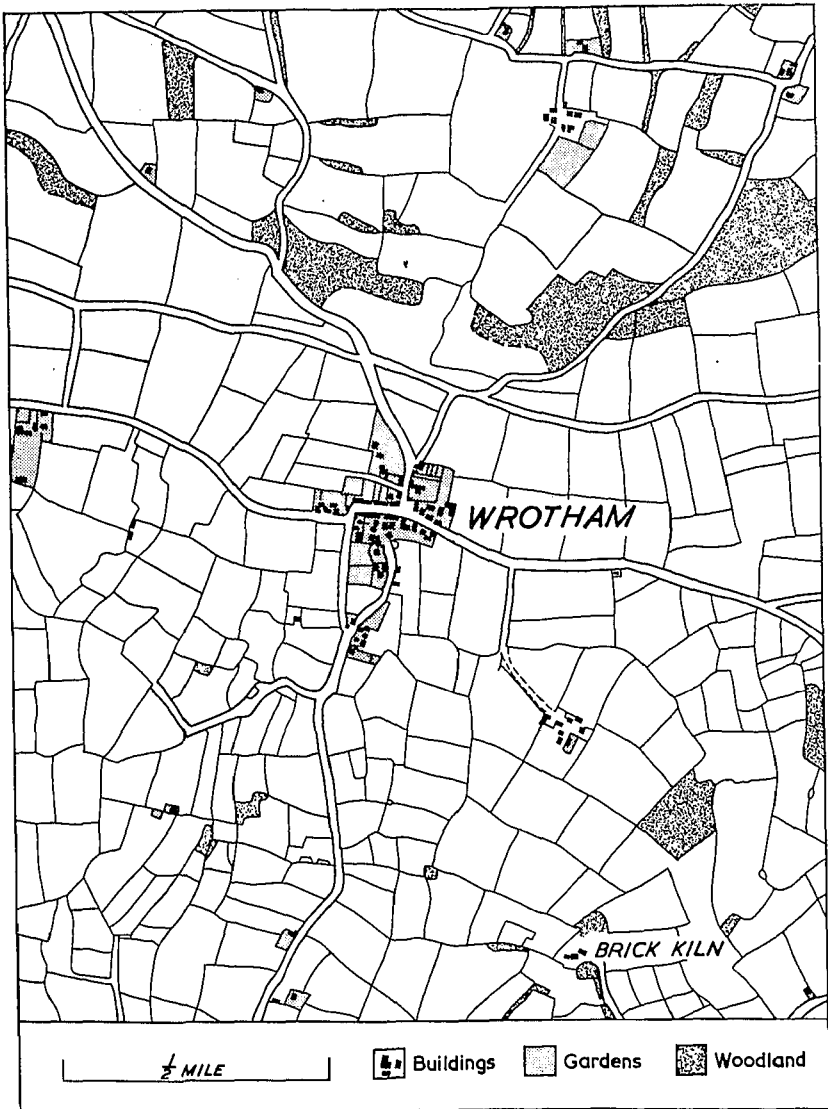


FIG. 3. Some field patterns in the Vale of Holmesdale, 1799.
Source: BM Ordnance Surveyors' Drawings (Portfolio 16, Sheet 99).

century established in a form which has remained basically unchanged to the present day.³

The settlement pattern of the early fourteenth century in the Weald comprised mostly hamlets and isolated farmsteads, products of tardy colonization and a relatively low population density, and similar patterns probably existed on the heavily wooded Clay-with-flints capping the Downs and on the London Clay of the Blean.⁴ Elsewhere—and most notably on the lower dip-slope of the Downs and in the Vale of Holmesdale—the earlier development of permanent settlement and greater density of population had produced a pattern of settlement which included villages as well as hamlets and isolated farmsteads.⁵ From a rental of 1447, it has been possible to reconstruct the relative positions of most of the 50 or so yokes and other fiscal divisions on the manor of Gillingham and approximately to locate many of the tenants' messuages: there was in 1447 a nucleation of settlement around the church but in addition the landscape was dotted with houses and granges, grouped sometimes in twos and threes but also existing as isolated farmsteads. Comparison with a rental of 1285 suggests that settlement was similarly dispersed then.⁶ A rental of 1494 of the manor of Wrotham reveals that few farmsteads had been erected in the heavily wooded Clay-with-flints country above the escarpment of the North Downs (some tenants who held land above the escarpment, *supra montem*, in fact had dwellings below it), most messuages were nucleated around the church at the foot of the escarpment, and there were hamlets and numerous isolated farmsteads dispersed throughout the township. Again, comparison with a rental of 1285 suggests a similar settlement pattern then.⁷ At Ightham, immediately to the west of Wrotham, settlement at the end of the fifteenth century comprised a village, seven hamlets and numerous dispersed farms.⁸ There had been a rapid growth of population in these and other Kentish townships during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries—some townships probably

³ The marshland areas of Kent are excluded from this present study because of their singular history of reclamation.

⁴ J. L. M. Gullely, 'The Wealden landscape in the early seventeenth century and its antecedents' (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of London, 1960), 356.

⁵ S. W. Wooldridge and D. L. Linton, 'The loam-terrains of southeast England and their relation to its early history,' *Antiquity*, 7 (1933), 297-310 and 'Some aspects of the Saxon settlement in southeast England considered in relation to the geographical background,' *Geography*, 20 (1935), 161-175.

⁶ Kent Archives Office (= KAO) U398 MIA and Canterbury Cathedral Library (= CCL) E24, ff. 29v-33v. See also A. R. H. Baker, 'Open fields and partible inheritance on a Kent manor,' *Econ. His. Rev.*, 2nd ser., 17 (1964-65), 1-23.

⁷ KAO U55 M59 and CCL E24, ff. 76-84v. See also A. R. H. Baker, 'Field systems in the Vale of Holmesdale,' *Agricultural History Review* (forthcoming).

⁸ E. Harrison, 'The court rolls and other records of the manor of Ightham as a contribution to local history,' *Arch. Cant.*, 48 (1936), 169-218 and 49 (1937), 1-95 and 'Some records of Ightham parish,' *Arch. Cant.*, 53 (1940), 17-23.

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saw a four- or five-fold expansion of their tenant populations⁹—resulting not only in an increase in the sizes of villages and hamlets but also in a dispersal of settlement. Gavelkind tenure probably encouraged population growth, by providing for all male (or failing male, then female) heirs and it certainly encouraged settlement dispersal.¹⁰ That the partitioning of patrimonial holdings sometimes produced isolated farmsteads is seen in a custumal of Wingham manor, 1285: 'if an inheritance . . . is divided into two or three portions when there are heirs, and each makes his messuage upon his portion,' then each will owe a separate hen-rent.¹¹

THE PATTERN OF LAND HOLDINGS

Settlements were dispersed but individual holdings were more or less compact. The fields and parcels of an individual holding were not scattered throughout a township but tended to be concentrated within one section of it. At Gillingham in 1285, nearly three quarters (73·6 per cent.) of the tenants' holdings lay within a single, although not the same, fiscal division and most of the remaining quarter (23 per cent.) were within 2·5 divisions: the lands of an individual holding were not widely scattered. By 1447, the proportion of tenants with land in only one fiscal division had been reduced to a third (32·7 per cent.) and the proportion with land in 2·5 divisions increased to over two-fifths (43·7 per cent.); these changes indicate a wider distribution of the constituents of an individual holding in 1447 than in 1285 and reflect both the lower tenant population of the manor at the later date (there were about 300 tenants in 1285, about 110 in 1447) and the growing inequality of holding sizes during the later middle ages.¹² At Wrotham, 1285, where there were 6 boroughs or sub-districts, the inhabitants of which were grouped together for the maintenance of law and order, only about 20 of the 409 tenants, or about 5 per cent., held land in more than one borough; by 1494 the comparable figure was 25 per cent.¹³ Individual holdings were more compact in the late thirteenth century than they were in the mid- and late-fifteenth century: they were also smaller.

It is impossible to discover the exact sizes of many individual holdings from the 1285 rentals: the Wrotham rental, for example,

⁹ F. R. H. Du Boulay, 'Partible inheritance in medieval Kent' (unpublished paper). I am most grateful to Prof. Du Boulay for kindly allowing me to see a typescript of this paper.

¹⁰ C. I. Elton, *The Tenures of Kent* (London, 1867), 39-44 and N. Neilson, 'Custom and the common law in Kent,' *Harvard Law Review*, 38 (1924-25), 482-498.

¹¹ CCL E24, f. 15.

¹² Baker, *loc. cit.* (1964-65), 7, 14-15 and 17.

¹³ KAO U55 M59 and CCL E24, ff. 76-84v.

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frequently lists five or more tenants as paying the rent on a single piece of land, but the general picture is one of small holdings such as William Blacson's 1 acre and John son of Dunstan's 7 acres. Inequality of holding size was increasing (already by 1285 one large holding had come to be termed a 'manor') but even in 1494 most holdings were small: one-fifth of the 131 holdings then owed rents of 1s. or less, nearly two-fifths owed rents of 2s. or less and just over one-half owed rents of 3s. or less. The lowest rent owed by a single holding was 2d., and the highest was £4 6s. 3d.: a rental of the same manor in 1538 shows that since 1494 the inequality of holding size had increased considerably. A typical holding at Wrotham at the end of the fifteenth century comprised a messuage, an adjacent garden, and a number of small crofts and larger fields, lying often as a compact unit and never widely scattered.¹⁴ At Gillingham, 1285, probably one half of the holdings were of two acres or less: by 1447 the comparable proportion was one quarter. At this later date, however, 66 per cent. of the holdings were still of 10 acres or less; 19 per cent. were of 10·1-50 acres; 9 per cent. were of 50·1-100 acres and 6 per cent. were of more than 100 acres.¹⁵ It was suggested earlier that population growth combined with gavelkind tenure to accentuate the dispersal of settlement in Kent during the thirteenth century. This same combination produced also a multiplicity of small holdings.¹⁶ In some places partitioning of inheritances resulted in holdings too small to be economically viable: in 1276 the lands of John of Cobham were disgavelled on the grounds that excessive partitioning had reduced holdings below subsistence size.¹⁷

THE EFFECTS OF PARTITIONING

P. Vinogradoff noted the impact of gavelkind tenure upon the Kentish landscape and suggested that settlement expansion might take three forms:

(1) Secondary colonization, i.e. the migration of one set of tenants to some outlying part of the estate or to an altogether new place of abode. This would have created a dispersed settlement pattern of compact farms

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, and KAO U55 M60/2. A typical holding at Wrotham in 1494 was that of Richard Cooke, who held in the borough of Hale for a rent of 2s. 10d. 'one piece of land called Bakisland, one parcel of land and meadow called Stokemeded and one piece of land called Taylers': KAO U55 M59, ff. 4-4v.

¹⁵ Baker, *loc. cit.* (1964-65), 7 and 15.

¹⁶ Elton, *op. cit.*, 41, 290-291, 369 and 384; H. L. Gray, *English Field Systems* (Cambridge, Mass., 1915), 272-304; G. C. Homans, 'Partible inheritance of villagers' holdings, *Econ. His. Rev.*, 8 (1937-38), 48-56 and 'The rural sociology of medieval England,' *Past and Present*, 4 (1953), 32-43; F. R. H. Du Boulay, *Medieval Bexley* (Bexley, 1961), 20-24.

¹⁷ *Cal. Ch. Rolls.*, 1257-1300, no. 198.

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and would have only been possible in an area of relatively low population density where there remained sufficient waste to allow expansion of the cultivated area (Fig. 4b).

(2) Fragmentation of holdings into minor yet compact parts. This would have created a dispersed settlement pattern only if a new farmstead were also erected, but it would certainly have led to lowering of the average size of the farms (Fig. 4c).

(3) Subdivision of the fields of a holding into intermixed parcels, tending to equalize advantages and disadvantages in the distribution of land on soils of differing qualities. This again would have created a dispersed settlement pattern only if a new farmstead were also erected but it would certainly have led to a pattern of subdivided fields (Fig. 4d).¹⁸

Examination of Kentish Feet of Fines throws some light on the effects of gavelkind tenure upon the size of holdings and the pattern of fields.¹⁹ A Fine was an instrument for transferring property and it represented, during the thirteenth century at least, an agreement made in the settlement of an action at law. For the period 1182-1272 there are nearly 1,500 Fines relating to land in Kent and of the 420 parishes into which the modern county is divided 370 are represented.²⁰ Gavelkind tenure is mentioned explicitly in only 5 of these Fines,²¹ but two characteristics of the tenure—a widow's claim to half of her husband's property and the equal claims to the other half by the other heirs—are discernible in many others. The Fines show beyond doubt that holdings were partitioned. A Fine relating to lands in East Peckham, 1248, demonstrates how the property of Blakemany de Stockingebir, amounting probably to about 30 acres, in the course of 4 generations became split up in a complex series of interests among 12 of his descendants.²² Only occasionally is precise indication given of the form partitioning was to take but there is no doubt that both the subdividing of fields and the fragmenting of holdings took place.

At Wye in 1227 individual fields were halved and halves of fields were halved again to effect subdivision. The holding of Richard le Brun comprised fields and halves of fields and after his death his four sons acknowledged one half of the holding to a third party and retained the other half themselves, so that the resulting parcels comprised halves

¹⁸ P. Vinogradoff, *English Society in the Eleventh Century* (Oxford, 1908), 274.

¹⁹ Transcriptions of Kentish Fines are conveniently contained in I. J. Churchill, R. Griffin and F. W. Hardman (eds.), 'Calendar of Kent Feet of Fines to the end of Henry III's reign,' *Kent Records*, 15 (1956). This volume contains a comprehensive introduction by F. W. Jessup.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, xiii, xxxvii and cviii.

²¹ *Ibid.*, lxxv.

²² *Ibid.*, 200.

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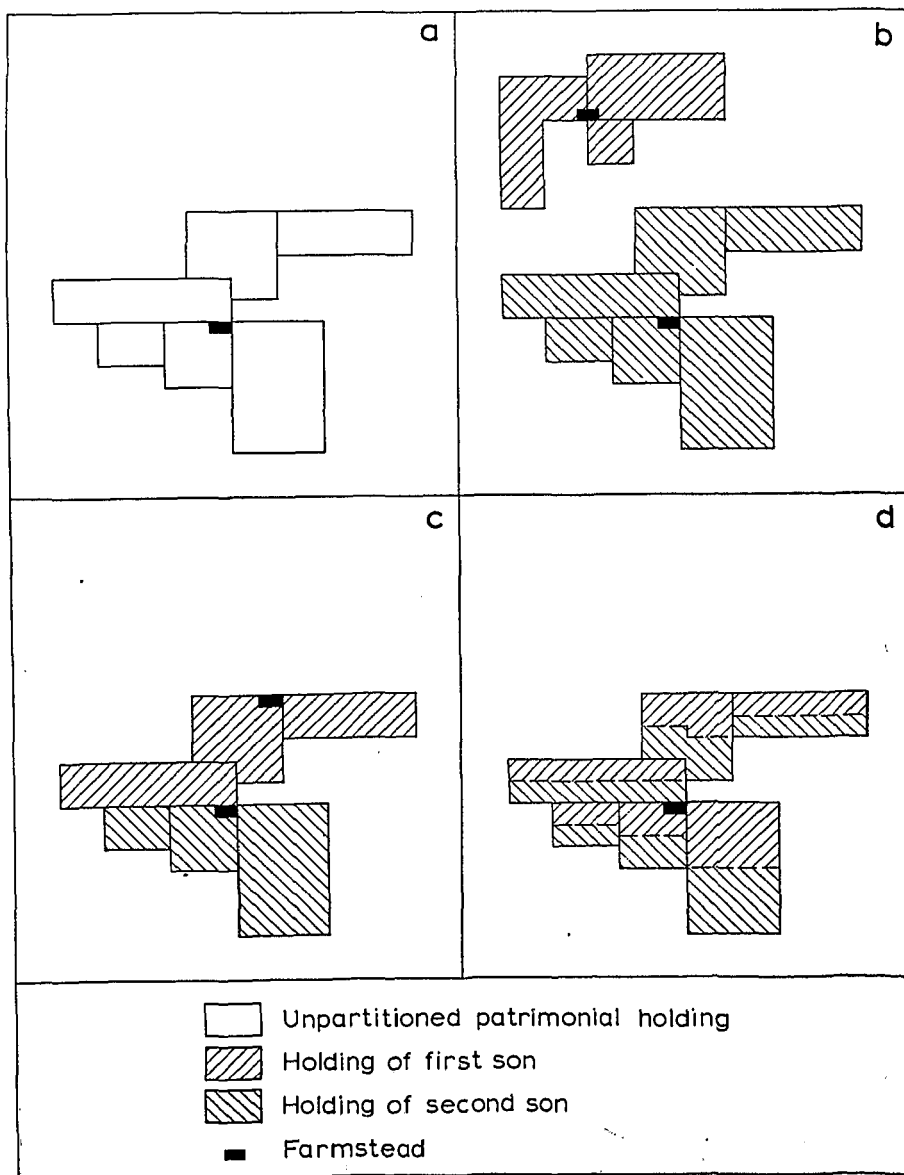


FIG. 4. Some hypothetical field and settlement patterns associated with a growing population and partible inheritance.

and quarters of fields. As Richard's four sons seem to have been joint-cultivators, his property was not partitioned in practice as much as it might have been in theory (Fig. 5).²³ At Kennington, 1227, 30 acres were partitioned so that a group of people received 'that half lying towards the east' and at Ospringe, 1227, one and a half yokes, thirteen acres and half a messuage were partitioned so that one person received 'that half which lies everywhere towards the north.'²⁴ It is uncertain whether this phraseology implies that individual fields and parcels were halved or whether the holdings were halved as wholes, but if soil values were to be shared with any equality it must at times imply the bisection and further subdivision of fields.²⁵ When manorial rentals, such as that of Wrotham, 1285, depict tenements held by persons bearing the same surname and comprising small parcels of exactly equal sizes it may be inferred that individual fields and parcels had been subdivided: thus William Fara's tenement was partitioned so that his sons Richard and Robert received jointly two parcels, of 3 acres 3 roods and of 6 acres, while Henry Fara, their brother, received two parcels of 1 acre 3½ roods and of 3 acres. Thus Henry claimed his third of the patrimonial holding while Richard and Robert held their two-thirds jointly: the land parcels, rents and services of the patrimonial holding had been partitioned in precise proportions, of two-thirds and one-third.²⁶

At times, partitioning of a patrimonial holding resulted in its fragmentation as a whole rather than subdivision of its individual fields and parcels. In 1262-63 the holding of William Peyforer comprised land in 8 parishes in north-central Kent and on his death it was partitioned among his wife and three sons. Because of the fragmented nature of the holding, it was partitioned as a whole rather than piece by piece. William's widow received in dower the manor of Sharstead and his three sons partitioned the remaining lands so that William, junior, and Richard jointly acquired lands in one parish and Fulk lands in six. Thus the patrimonial holding was fragmented into 3 (not 4, because William and Richard seem to have been co-partners). It was further agreed that on the death of their mother the manor of Sharstead was to descend undivided to William and Richard, for Fulk quitclaimed his share. The patrimonial holding would then be fragmented not into 3 but only 2 ownership units (Fig. 6).²⁷ Similar fragmentations were

²³ *Ibid.*, 94-95.

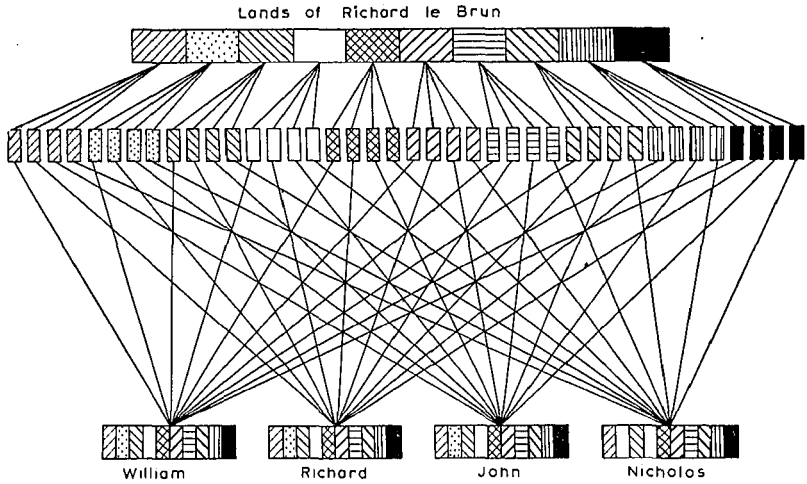
²⁴ *Ibid.*, 101 and 105.

²⁵ Gray, *op. cit.*, 296: 'Division among co-heirs probably involved giving to each his share of the several qualities of land within the *iugum* . . . Since allotments of different quality must frequently have been non-contiguous, the tenants of a subdivided *iugum* would find their holdings consisting of scattered parcels.'

²⁶ CCL E24, ff. 81v-82.

²⁷ Churchill *et. al.*, *op. cit.*, 339-340.

A. THEORY



B. PRACTICE

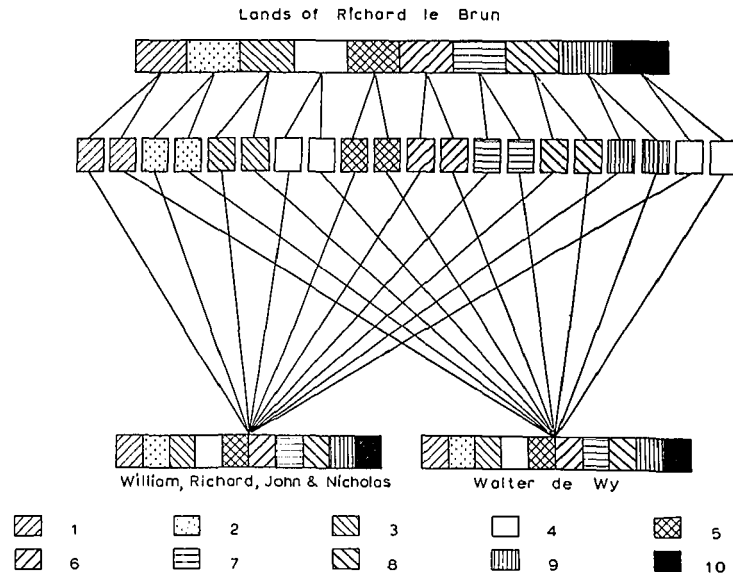


FIG. 5. Inheritance of the holding of Richard le Brun in 1227.
Source: Churchill *et. al.*, *op. cit.*, 94-95.

Key to the unpartitioned holding:

1. Half of Redebrook; 2. Half of Wiredesham; 3. A croft; 4. Half of Kingesfield; 5. Half of Santesdane; 6. Half of the land of Fannes; 7. The Vale of Biltesberh; 8. Half of la Falaise; 9. Half of Meleland; 10. Land which lies under the garden.

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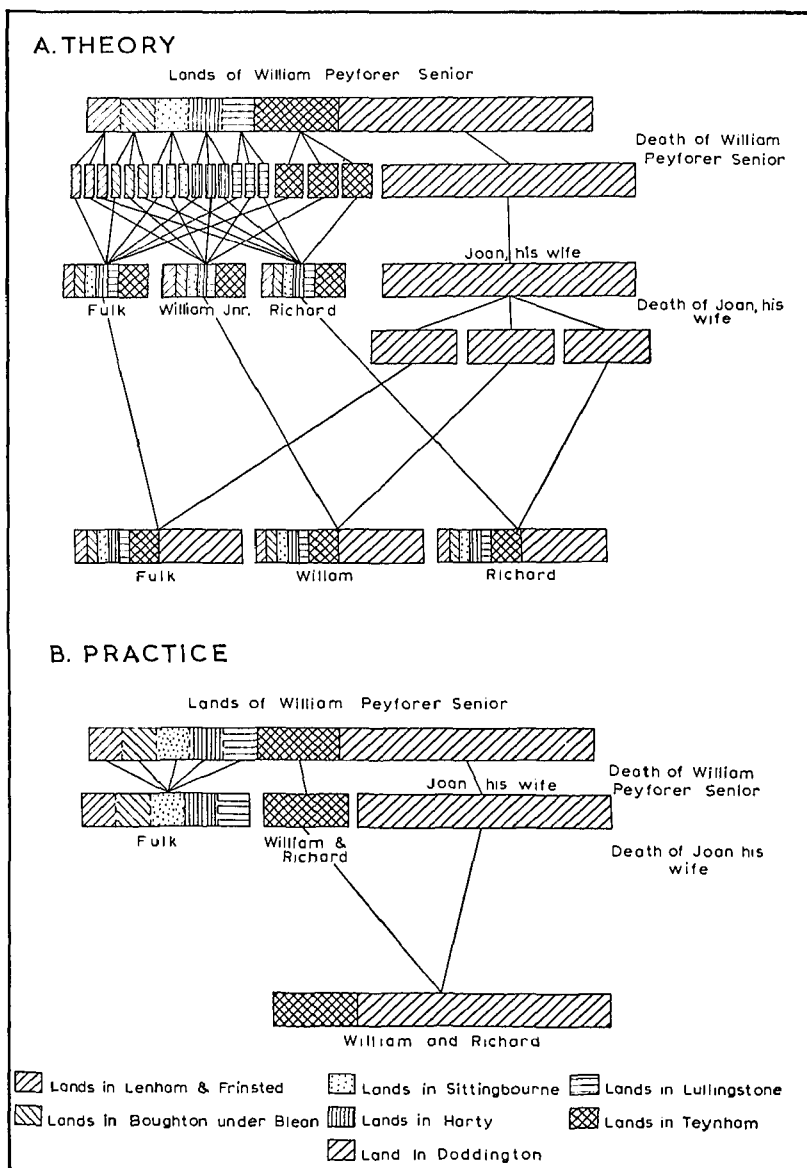


FIG. 6. Inheritance of the holding of William Peyforer in 1262-63.
 Source: Churchill *et al.*, *op. cit.*, 339-340.

effected on the holding of John de Esthall in the Orpington area in 1241 and on the scattered holding of William de Faulkham in 1249-50.²⁸

Partitioning of holdings, together with the subdivision of rents and services attached to them, led to the disintegration of yokes (*iuga*). Yokes in Kent were fiscal divisions, for the assessment of rents and services. Although the sizes of yokes at Gillingham, for example, varied considerably, the labour services and customs due from them had been largely uniform. While services and customs were exacted, it was principally in the money rents they owed that yokes at Gillingham differed from each other. The rent due from each yoke was related not to the area of each unit but to the quality of its soils: jugation at Gillingham was an assessment of land potential.²⁹ The *iugum* was devised at the end of the third century by the Romans as a means of assessing rapidly the contribution of taxes from parts of a large land area³⁰ and by the early middle ages it had become a system, an adaptable system, of assessing rents and services due from land holdings. The woodland area which belonged to the manor of Aldington and which was divided into denns had, by 1285, been arranged into half and quarter yokes, burdened with carrying services and suit of court.³¹ Of Haythurst and Finchurst, two Wealden denns of the manor of Gillingham, it was said that 'the tenants of these denns associate together as two yokes (*pro duobus juga*) when a collection happens to be made for Rochester Bridge or for a taxation of yokes.'³² Many rentals and surveys show that thirteenth century yokes—and *logi*, *virgates* and *tenementa*, the other principal fiscal units of assessment—had personal names, which suggests that they had often formerly been in the hands of a single tenant, or at least of a small group of tenants, probably collaterals. Some were held in this way at the beginning of the thirteenth century and as late as 1285 John Brutyn was the sole tenant of *Jugum Brutyn* in Gillingham.³³ But many yokes had been partitioned by that time. In c. 1214 the 17 yokes of gavelkind land at Bexley were held by 47 persons. Of these 17, three were held by only one tenant, five more were probably held in a previous generation by only one tenant and two more were probably held by single tenants two generations back. Even in the early thirteenth century few of these yokes were held by more than two or three partners, who were often brothers. By 1284, however, these same yokes were divided among at

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 158-159 and 230.

²⁹ A. R. H. Baker, 'The Kentish *iugum*: its relationship to soils at Gillingham,' *English Historical Review*, 81 (1966)—forthcoming.

³⁰ F. Lot, 'Le jugum le manse et les exploitations agricole de la France moderne', in *Mélanges d'Histoire offerts à Henri Pirenne*, vol. 1 (1926), 307-326.

³¹ F. R. H. Du Boulay, 'Denms, droving and danger,' *Arch. Cant.*, 76 (1961), 75-87.

³² *Ibid.*, 82.

³³ CCL E24, f. 30v.

least 150 persons.³⁴ At Gillingham, *Pieresyok* had 8 tenants in 1285 but it is described as 'the yoke formerly of Peter'; *Soperesyok* had 5 tenants but in the previous generation it probably had only 3; and 10 tenants held 'the yoke of Reginald at Upeton.'³⁵ *Tenementum Osberti*, in West Wickham, had 5 tenants in 1310 and *Tenementum Elfryk atte Derefold*, in Lenham, had 13 in 1302.³⁶ The fact that a fiscal unit had at one time been in the hands of a single tenant or small group of tenants, together with the fact that at the end of the thirteenth century the lands of an individual holding were still concentrated in one part of a township, shows that the original fiscal assessment was concerned with more or less compact family holdings. A yoke was not necessarily a single family farm, however; rather single family farms were assessed as single yokes or as multiples or fractions of a yoke, according not simply to the size of the farm but to the qualities of its soils. By the end of the thirteenth century—with the growth of population, the partitioning of holdings and the impact of an active market in land—a single yoke had often lost its character as an agrarian unit, for by then it was occupied by many tenants. Nevertheless, it retained its importance as a fiscal unit, the services and rents of which were minutely subdivided among these tenants. With the commutation of services, a yoke lost even its fiscal validity and gradually it disappeared from the records. Thus a rental of Wrotham in 1285, by which time most services on the manor had probably been commuted (they certainly had by 1309), contains references to only 7 full or half yokes and a rental of 1494 makes no reference to yokes at all.³⁷ By contrast, a rental of Gillingham in 1285, when most services were still exacted, contains references to 31 full, double or half yokes and a rental of 1447, when services had only recently been commuted (commutation having taken place between 1442 and 1447) contains references to 29 full or double yokes.³⁸

The effects of partitioning were not as far-reaching as they might have been, for they were counterbalanced by a number of processes. Holdings were not partitioned either as often or as minutely in practice as they might have been in theory. Some were probably farmed jointly by co-heirs. Nearly 40 Fines for the period 1182-1272 record brothers purchasing or renting land and they may have been agricultural as well as financial partners. In 1255, the holding of William de Mares in northwest Kent was partitioned among his widow and four sons: the apportionment of lands is described in detail and it appears that William and Richard each held his lands on his own while John and

³⁴ Du Boulay, *op. cit.*, 21-22.

³⁵ CCL E24, f. 29v.

³⁶ KAO U312 M21 and U55 M210.

³⁷ CCL E24, ff. 76-78; Lambeth Palace Library (= LPL) CR119; KAO U55 M59.

³⁸ CCL E24, ff. 29v-33v; KAO U398 MIA; LPL CR461.

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Henry held theirs jointly.³⁹ Where brothers appear as joint-holders of land, it seems reasonable to assume that they may have been joint cultivators as well. Rentals frequently refer to *heredes*, *socii*, *parcenarii* and *pares*, which may be interpreted either as implying the joint-holding of a tenement or as representing no more than a clerically convenient way of recording the responsibility for rents and services from a partitioned holding. There is no way of solving this problem, and it can only be said that some of these phrases probably indicate joint-holding. It is certain, however, that the partitioning effects of gavelkind tenure were counteracted and to some extent reversed by another characteristic of that tenure, namely free alienation *inter vivos*. Any one of a number of co-heirs could alienate all or part of his share of an inheritance, either to one or more of the other co-heirs (in which case the effects of partitioning would be mitigated, possibly nullified) or to an outsider (in which case the patrimonial holding would still have been broken up).⁴⁰ Freedom to alienate holdings certainly stimulated the market in land, enabled the more enterprising and more prosperous tenants to augment their holdings by purchase or lease and resulted in a growing inequality in the size of land holdings.⁴¹

SUBDIVIDED DEMESNE FIELDS

Not all of the fields which appear on early estate maps as being subdivided into unenclosed parcels of land were a consequence of the operation of gavelkind tenure. Some originated from the leasing of former demesne fields not in their entirety but in parcels to different tenants. While demesne fields in Kent were being directly cultivated by manorial lords and their officials, they were frequently sown in sections with more than one kind of crop in a field in any given year.⁴² And as the fields had often been sown in sections with different crops, so they came to be leased out in parcels to different tenants. At Otford small portions of demesne fields were being leased to tenants by the

³⁹ Churchill *et al.*, *op. cit.*, 411-412.

⁴⁰ The Feet of Fines contain many examples of such modifications to inheritances; Churchill *et al.*, *op. cit.*, *passim*. For more detailed discussion of this topic, see A. R. H. Baker, 'The field systems of Kent' (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of London, 1963), 272-288.

⁴¹ F. R. H. Du Boulay, 'Gavelkind and knight's fee in medieval Kent,' *English Historical Review*, 77 (1962), 504-511 and *op. cit.*, 22-25; Baker, *op. cit.* (1964-65), 7 and 18-21; Gullely, *op. cit.*, 354-356.

⁴² This practice has been observed on a number of manors. For example, at Wrotham; Baker, *loc. cit.* (forthcoming); at Westerham; T. A. M. Bishop, 'The rotation of crops at Westerham, 1297-1350,' *Econ. His. Rev.*, 9 (1938), 38-44; at Otford; F. R. H. Du Boulay, 'Late-continued demesne farming at Otford,' *Arch. Cant.*, 73 (1959), 116-124; at Bexley; Du Boulay, *op. cit.*, 7; at Westwell; A. Smith, 'A geographical study of agriculture on the Kentish manors of Canterbury Cathedral Priory, 1272-1379' (unpublished M.A. thesis, University of Liverpool, 1961), 47; and at Thurnham; KAO U512 T2.

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early fifteenth century.⁴³ The leasing of small parcels of demesnes acquired increasing importance during the fourteenth century on some of the manors of Canterbury Cathedral Priory, such as Monkton and Ickham in East Kent.⁴⁴ At Wrotham, 1399-1400, the lord was cultivating most of his 250 or so acres of arable but about 12 acres were leased to his tenants in various of the manor's fields (*in diversis campis huius manerii*), for a total rent of 11s. 2d. By 1406-7 this practice had been extended, for although most of the demesne was being cultivated by the lord, leased portions produced a rent of £2 16s. 0d.⁴⁵ Comparison of names of demesne fields in a custumal of 1285 and later account rolls with names of subdivided fields on a map of part of Wrotham manor in 1620 shows that some subdivided fields in Kent developed from the cropping and then the leasing of demesne fields in sections.⁴⁶

CO-ARATION AND FIELD PATTERNS

It has often been suggested that strip fields in the midlands were closely associated with co-aration, that each contributor to a joint plough team was allotted a strip or strips of each day's ploughing.⁴⁷ The extent to which subdivided arable fields in Kent were similarly produced is difficult to determine. An examination of the relationship between ploughing techniques and field shapes in Kent concluded that with the turn-wrest plough most commonly used in the county it was just as possible to plough squarish plots as rectangular strips and assumed that intermixed strips in the county resulted from co-aration.⁴⁸ The practice of co-aration in medieval Kent can be substantiated. A custumal of the manor of Wingham, 1285, states: 'every tenant who resides in the hundred and who has a fully-yoked plough shall, by reason of his tenements within the precinct of the manor, plough one acre of *gerserth* and he who has less shall plough proportionately, in such a way that if any tenant shall join with a non-tenant or with anyone who does not owe ploughing service, he shall come to plough with as many beasts as he has at the plough and the bedel shall make up one plough from the horses of those who do not have a full plough.'⁴⁹ In the portion of the custumal dealing with Grain, it is stated: 'every joint-plough within the precinct of the manor shall plough half an acre (of the demesne).'⁵⁰ Similar references to co-aration come from Lyminge, Northfleet and

⁴³ Du Boulay, *loc. cit.* (1959), 121.

⁴⁴ R. A. L. Smith, *Canterbury Cathedral Priory. A Study in Monastic Administration* (London, 1943), 192.

⁴⁵ LPL CR 1142 and 1145.

⁴⁶ CCL E24, f. 76; KAO U55 M64-67 and U681 P31.

⁴⁷ C. S. and C. S. Orwin, *The Open Fields* (2nd edn., Oxford, 1954), 1-68.

⁴⁸ M. D. Nightingale, 'Ploughing and field shape,' *Antiquity*, 27 (1953), 20-26

⁴⁹ CCL E24, f. 11v.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, f. 33.

Teynham.⁵¹ At Sundridge, c. 1258, ploughing services were assessed in proportion to a tenant's ownership of a whole or part of a plough team: presumably those who owned only a part joined with others to make a full team.⁵² Co-aration might have given rise to a pattern of unenclosed parcels in some parts of Kent, although there is no evidence that it actually did so. The fact that settlements were dispersed and that individual holdings were more or less compact suggests, as does the wording of the Wingham customal, that co-aration in Kent was a venture in agricultural co-operation by friends and neighbours. Some of the many subdivided fields shared by only a few tenants might have been products of such private agreements.

COMMON ARABLE FIELDS?

It now becomes necessary to ask whether agricultural co-operation in medieval Kent included not only co-aration but also cultivation and grazing of arable fields in common: were subdivided arable fields in fact common arable fields? Most land in Kent was held in severalty.⁵³ In the Weald in the early fourteenth century enclosed pastures held in severalty covered substantial acreages and Feet of Fines suggest that land was held in severalty throughout the county.⁵⁴ It was in fact pleaded in 1322 that no man in Kent could pasture his livestock in common on gavelkind lands and it seems that most cultivated land was held in severalty.⁵⁵ Nevertheless, it would have been difficult to graze unenclosed parcels of land and this difficulty was overcome in two ways; first, individuals sometimes put up temporary folds around their own unenclosed parcels; secondly, groups of owners with unenclosed parcels in the same field sometimes came to private agreements about pasturing the field in common.

Farming practices on tenant holdings in the middle ages are difficult to discern, partly because they were not controlled by a manorial court. In an exchange of lands at Kennington, 1268-9, one man was granted in the woods of another 'reasonable estovers for housebote and haybote for burning and fencing and for repairing his folds.'⁵⁶ Many tenants of archiepiscopal manors had to provide hurdles for the lord's folds and it may be assumed that some tenants followed the demesne practice of folding livestock.⁵⁷ Folding was practised on the demesne at Deal in

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, ff. 40, 64 and 87v.

⁵² H. W. Knocker, 'The evolution of the Holmesdale. No. 3. The manor of Sundridge,' *Arch. Cant.*, 44 (1932), 189-210.

⁵³ J. E. A. Jolliffe, *Pre-Feudal England: The Jutes* (London, 1933), 7 and 14.

⁵⁴ Gulley, *op. cit.*, 322; Churchill *et al.*, *op. cit.*, *passim*.

⁵⁵ A. Fitzherbert, *Grand Abridgement of the Common Law*, II (1516), xiv-xv, cited in Gulley, *op. cit.*, 320.

⁵⁶ Churchill, *op. cit.*, 355.

⁵⁷ Folding was practised on the demesnes at Wrotham (CCL E24, f. 84) and Gillingham (CCL E24, ff. 29v and 33, and BM Add. Ms. 29, 794, m.3).

the fourteenth century and on the unenclosed arable lands of the tenantry in the seventeenth century, and sheep folding was required by covenant in some leases on land in the Folkestone area in the eighteenth century.⁵⁸ It seems that individuals folded their own stock on their own lands, there being no evidence of fold-courses such as were used in East Anglia.⁵⁹ An alternative to folding was the common pasturing of subdivided fields by private agreement. Some tenants were compelled to graze their livestock collectively on the arable demesne and again it may be assumed that tenants sharing subdivided fields sometimes followed this practice by mutual agreement.⁶⁰ Such agreements would have represented no more than common sense arrangements which were rarely written down. One such agreement, made in 1246, relates to lands in Bekesbourne. William de Beck quitclaimed to his brother, Richard, a moiety of 48 acres of land in Bekesbourne which he claimed as 'his reasonable part of the inheritance of William de Beck their father whose heirs they are.' Richard granted to William in exchange a rent of 20s. yearly from a tenement in Bekesbourne which Henry de Bourne had held from their father. In addition, Richard agreed that William and his heirs might have 'pasture for 4 cows yearly in the pasture of Richard in the said vill from Easter to Michaelmas except the pasture of the garden of Richard and his heirs . . . and if Richard and his heirs do not wish to put their cows in the pasture nevertheless it shall be lawful for William and his heirs to turn their cows in whenever they will without hindrance of Richard and his heirs.'⁶¹ Most subdivided fields in Kent were shared by small numbers of tenants: agricultural co-operation, where practised, involved only few tenants and not the entire community of a township. For the end of the eighteenth century we have the testimony of John Boys, 'an able and successful farmer [at Betteshanger, in East Kent], and a famous breeder of South Down sheep,' who wrote in his report to the Board of Agriculture: 'there is no portion of Kent that is occupied by a community of persons, as in many other counties.'⁶²

⁵⁸ A. R. H. Baker, 'The field system of an East Kent parish (Deal),' *Arch. Cant.*, 78 (1963), 96-117; G. E. Mingay, 'Estate management in eighteenth-century Kent,' *Agricultural History Review*, 4 (1956), 108-113.

⁵⁹ Gray, *op. cit.*, 305-354; K. J. Allison, 'The sheep-corn husbandry of Norfolk in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries,' *Agricultural History Review*, 5 (1957), 12-31. Individuals certainly folded their own stock on their own unenclosed parcels in fields on the Sussex Downs; A. M. M. Melville, 'The pastoral custom and local wool trade of medieval Sussex, 1085-1485' (unpublished M.A. thesis, University of London, 1931), 75 and 128; J. C. Cornwall, 'The agrarian history of Sussex, 1560-1640' (unpublished M.A. thesis, University of London, 1953), 98-100.

⁶⁰ CCL E24, f. 84.

⁶¹ Churchill, *op. cit.*, 192.

⁶² C. Matson, 'Men of Kent, 1. Boys of Bonnington,' *Arch. Cant.*, 79 (1964), 70-76; J. Boys, *General View of the Agriculture of the County of Kent* (2nd ed., 1813; first published 1796), 61.

CONCLUSIONS

Although some subdivided fields in Kent originated from the leasing of demesne fields in parcels and some may have been produced by co-ration, it seems that most resulted from the partitioning of formerly more or less compact family holdings among co-heirs and from the early development of the land market: both partibility and free alienation were features of gavelkind tenure. Partitioning produced numerous small holdings and the form that it took varied regionally. In predominantly arable regions it produced subdivided fields as the more fertile soils were often claimed equally by co-heirs, whereas in predominantly pastoral regions, where soils were less conducive to arable cultivation, fragmentation of holdings caused less disruption of animal husbandry than subdivision of fields and parcels.⁶³ Most subdivided arable fields in Kent were located on fertile soils in Holmesdale, in the valleys of the Darent, Medway and Stour, and on the lower dip-slopes of the Downs. In contrast, few were located in the Weald, in the Clay-with-flints country at the crest of the Downs and in the Blean on London Clay.⁶⁴ Another reason for the relative absence of subdivided fields in these last-mentioned areas was that, being heavily wooded and having generally poor soils, they were brought into cultivation by secondary colonization and had lower densities of population than other parts of the county in the early fourteenth century. In these areas, with only slight pressure of population upon land resources in the early middle ages, much land was enclosed direct from the waste and was rarely subdivided into unenclosed parcels.⁶⁵ The highest densities of population were in north and east Kent and it was here that most subdivision of fields took place.⁶⁶ Pressure of population upon land increased during the thirteenth century, resulting in much partitioning of holdings. By the fifteenth century, with pressure upon land much reduced and with the growing practice of disposing of land by will, the partitioning of holdings was probably more the exception than the rule; it was certainly so by the sixteenth century. By the mid-six-

⁶³ By c. 1300 agricultural regions in Kent were well established, the most striking contrast being between the wheat-barley-sheep husbandry of north and east Kent and the oats-cattle-pigs economy of the Weald. R. A. Pelham, 'The relation of soils to grain-growing in Kent in the thirteenth century,' *Empire Journal of Experimental Agriculture*, 1 (1933), 82-84; Gulley, *op. cit.*, 319-348; A. Smith, 'Regional differences in crop production in medieval Kent,' *Arch. Cant.*, 78 (1963), 147-160.

⁶⁴ Baker, *loc. cit.* (1965), Fig. 2, p. 22: 'Distribution of subdivided fields indicated in pre-1700 estate maps'; D. Roden and A. R. H. Baker, 'Field systems of the Chiltern Hills and parts of Kent from the late thirteenth to the early seventeenth century,' *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 38 (forthcoming), Fig. 6: 'Distribution of subdivided fields indicated in the Feet of Fines, 1182-1272'.

⁶⁵ Gulley, *op. cit.*, 354-355 and 364-365.

⁶⁶ H. A. Hanley and C. W. Chalklin, 'The Kent lay subsidy of 1334/5,' *Kent Records*, 18 (1964), 58-172, especially pp. 63-67.

teenth century density of population in the Weald had become greater than in some other parts of the county (Fig. 7) but by then the growth of alternative employment (in the cloth and iron industries especially) had combined with the physical restraints on arable farming to limit subdivision of fields.⁶⁷

Gavelkind tenure not only encouraged the creation of numerous small holdings and subdivision of fields, it also facilitated the growth of large holdings and early enclosure of land parcels. Free alienation of land encouraged early leasing, exchanging and selling of land, and thus the consolidating and augmenting of individual holdings. As the parcels and fields of an individual holding were usually located within one part of a township rather than distributed throughout it, consolidation was a less exacting process in Kent than it was in the midlands. Moreover, those fields which were subdivided into unenclosed parcels were usually small, with few tenants, and they were not grazed in common by the livestock of an entire farming community. Piecemeal consolidation of holdings resulted in their early enclosure. By the seventeenth century, the Kentish landscape was largely enclosed. Other factors—such as proximity to London and the precocious spread of commercial influences,⁶⁸ or the use of the turn-wrest rather than the mould-board plough⁶⁹—may have contributed to early enclosure of open fields in Kent but more significant were the free market in land, the pattern of compact land holdings and the private nature of agricultural practices.

Not all Kentish fields were enclosed early, some remained unenclosed (although not necessarily still containing land parcels in intermixed ownership and/or occupation) until the nineteenth century and even until the present day.⁷⁰ Their survival can be explained in three ways: first, unenclosed fields survived longest where their subdivision into intermixed open parcels had been most acute and the process of consolidation most complex; secondly, many survived in the prosperous arable areas, on the most fertile soils, where hedges would have reduced

⁶⁷ Christopher Baker, an Admiralty official, reported in 1578 that the number of iron furnaces and mills in the Weald 'is greatlie to the decaie spoile & overthrowe of woodes & principall tymber with a greate decaie also of tillage for that they are Contynewallie imploied in Carrying of Furniture for the said works': State Papers Domestic, Elizabeth, Book 117, no. 39, cited in D. and G. Mathew, 'Iron furnaces in south-eastern England and English ports and landing places, 1578,' *English Historical Review*, 48 (1933), 91-99.

⁶⁸ R. H. Tawney, *The Agrarian Problem of the Sixteenth Century* (London, 1912), 405; C. S. and C. S. Orwin, *The Open Fields* (Oxford, 2nd edn., 1954), 68.

⁶⁹ Nightingale, *loc. cit.*, 25; Nightingale suggests that the turn-wrest plough could be used to produce square plots just as easily as the strips usually produced by the fixed mould-board plough and concludes that 'the great number of plots that were ploughed in parts of Kent probably accounts for early inclosure there.'

⁷⁰ For example, in the Isle of Thanet and parts of East Kent. For a specific example, Deal, see Baker, *loc. cit.* (1963), 96-103.

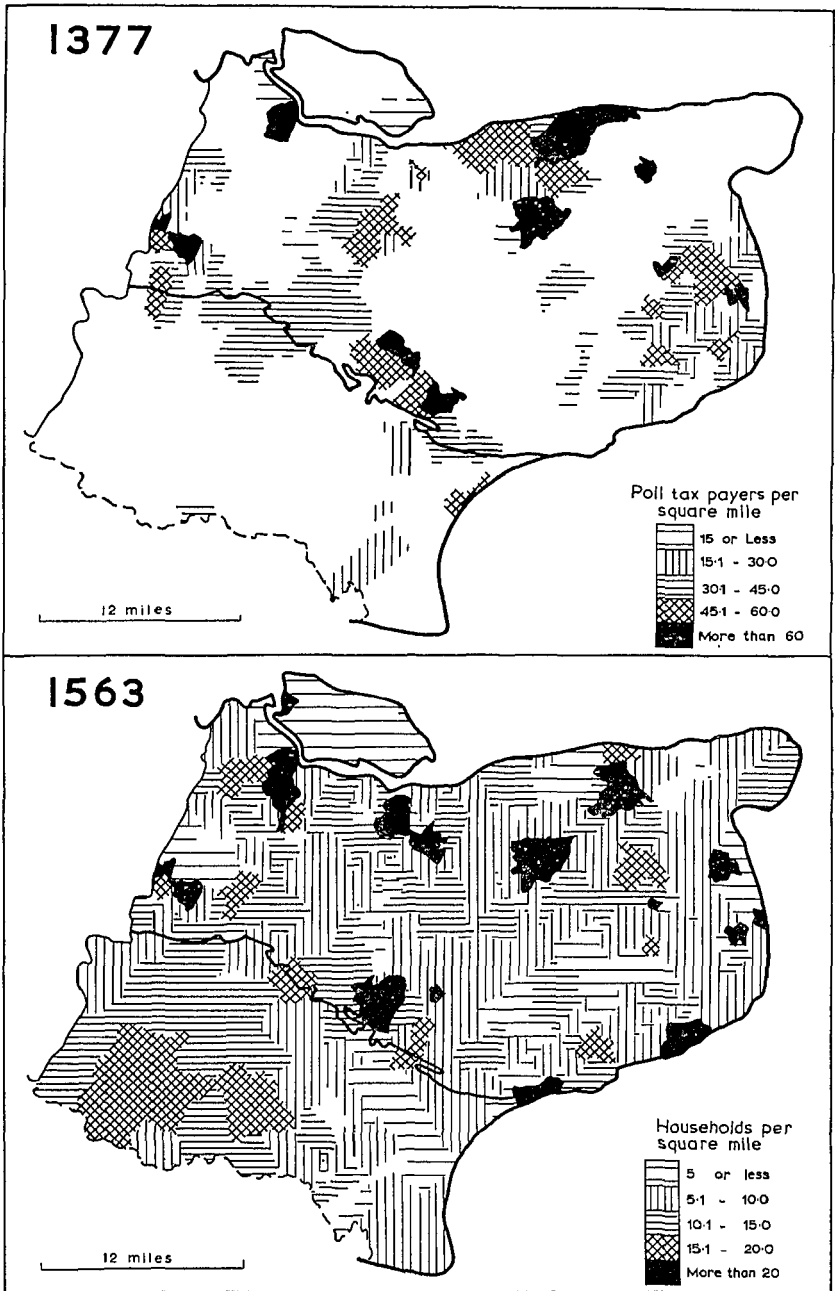


FIG. 7. Some population densities in the diocese of Canterbury, 1377 and 1563
 Source: 1377 Poll Tax—PRO E 179/123/32, 33, 35, 38-42 and E 179/129/760 and 762.

1563 Ecclesiastical Enumeration—BM Harl. Ms. 594(8), ff. 63-84.
 Areas for which no information is available have been left blank.

the area of productive land and livestock could be controlled by temporary fences; thirdly, unenclosed fields survived on dry soils formed from the Upper Chalk, where ditch draining was unnecessary and often exposed locations made the growing of hedges on thin soils difficult.⁷¹ But by 1600 most fields in Kent were enclosed and later centuries saw not an enclosure movement but an opening up of the landscape by the grubbing-up of hedges as fields were enlarged and holdings amalgamated.⁷² Thus the later as well as the earlier history of the Kentish rural landscape differed considerably from that of the rural landscape of a midland county such as Leicestershire.

A FINAL COMMENT

The phrase 'the Kentish field system,' brought into common usage more than half a century ago by H. L. Gray in his classic *English Field Systems*, has outlived its usefulness.⁷³ The word 'system' is something of a misnomer, for a communally imposed field organization is not to be found in Kent. But by 'system' Gray did not necessarily mean 'systematic organization,' for he defined 'field system' as 'the manner in which the inhabitants of a township subdivided and tilled their arable, meadow and pasture land.'⁷⁴ It thus becomes preferable to refer to 'the field systems of Kent' because different periods of colonization, the differing impact of gavelkind tenure, varied types of farming and contrasting densities of population combined to produce different field systems in physically contrasted parts of the county.

The evolution of contrasting field systems within a single county was not peculiar to Kent—field systems in Warwickshire and in Essex, for example, show marked regional differences.⁷⁵ Was the peculiarity of 'Kentish' field systems their close association with gavelkind tenure? C. I. Elton believed that gavelkind tenure *sensu stricto* was peculiar to Kent but that one of its characteristics, partible inheritance, was found

⁷¹ A. D. Hall and E. J. Russell, *A Report on the Agriculture and Soils of Kent, Surrey and Sussex* (London, 1911), 101-102: the greatest difficulty of East Kent farming upon the Chalk is to retain enough moisture in the soil and 'hedges will not grow in a very satisfactory manner.' Similar reasons for the long-continued existence of unenclosed fields on Chalk formations have been noted in Wiltshire, Hampshire and Yorkshire: E. Kerridge, 'Agriculture c. 1500-c. 1793,' *V.C.H. Wilts.*, 4 (1959), 43-64, on p. 46; M. Naish, 'The agricultural landscape of the Hampshire Chalklands, 1700-1840' (unpublished M.A. thesis, University of London, 1961), 82 and 185-186; A. Harris, *The Rural Landscape of the East Riding of Yorkshire 1700-1850* (London, 1961), 62-64.

⁷² Baker, *loc. cit.* (1965), 25.

⁷³ Gray, *op. cit.*, 272-304: Chapter VII 'The Kentish system.'

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁷⁵ R. H. Hilton, 'Social structure of rural Warwickshire in the middle ages,' *Dugdale Society Occasional Papers*, 9 (1950); F. Hull, 'Agriculture and rural society in Essex, 1560-1640' (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of London, 1950), 11-82.

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in many parts of Britain.⁷⁶ Partible inheritance has been observed as producing small holdings in many parts of England: in the fenland of Lincolnshire, for example, partible inheritance produced numerous small holdings during the thirteenth century and was still conducive to their preservation in the sixteenth century.⁷⁷ In other places, partible inheritance produced a pattern of fields subdivided into unenclosed parcels: in the Ouse Basin in Yorkshire, for example, assarts originally cleared and cultivated by individuals were, during the thirteenth century as a consequence of the growth of population, divided up by being shared among the heirs of the original assarters.⁷⁸ Where partible inheritance was not the law it may have been the custom to make provision for the livelihoods of younger sons. The influence of partible inheritance—or at least of some form of partible succession to land—on the evolution of English field systems needs more careful investigation.⁷⁹ Even in Leicestershire, in the heart of the area characterized by the 'midland field system,' some holdings in the middle ages were subdivided by inheritance and newly made assarts and crofts were partitioned into unfenced parcels, and in the sixteenth century the parcel pattern was still being modified by partitioning among co-heirs.⁸⁰ If the so-called 'Kentish system' has been shown to have had little 'system,' it would also seem to have not necessarily been peculiarly 'Kentish.'

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⁷⁶ Elton, *op. cit.*, 45-56.

⁷⁷ H. E. Hallam, 'Some thirteenth-century censuses,' *Econ. His. Rev.*, 2nd ser. 10 (1957-58), 340-361; J. Thirsk, *English Peasant Farming. The Agrarian History of Lincolnshire from Tudor to Recent Times* (London, 1957), 44.

⁷⁸ T. A. M. Bishop, 'Assarting and the growth of the open fields,' *Econ. His. Rev.*, 6 (1935-36), 13-29.

⁷⁹ J. Thirsk, 'The common fields,' *Past and Present*, 29 (1964), 3-25.

⁸⁰ R. H. Hilton, 'Medieval agrarian history,' *V.C.H. Leics.*, 2 (1954), 145-198, on pp. 138, 166 and 170; W. G. Hoskins, *Essays in Leicestershire History* (Liverpool, 1950), 136.