

The common-field village of Midland England

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Abstract

The enclosure of the open fields farmed in common in the Midlands of England was accomplished in several stages. The enclosures of the seventeenth century were a turning point in the development of capitalist production. Paradoxically this was a triumph for open-field farming.

This paper is based on an analysis of the local agrarian economy and illustrated from the writings of two contemporary protagonists in the national debate on development.

Keywords

England, farming, common-fields, open-fields, village, enclosure

Land utilised in common contributes very little towards present-day agricultural production in England. Fences, hedges and stone walls striding across the landscape and up hillsides bear silent witness to the successful conversion of large tracts of forest, moorland and other open countryside into private property, popularly said nowadays to have been achieved by unscrupulous landowners and in the eighteenth century. Enclosure of commons is a cause that raises passions of outrage, especially when seen to be taming wilder regions of marginal interest to agriculture. The study of the history of the use made of commons is full of fascinating details of the industrious traditional exploitation of all kinds of gifts of nature which are now ignored except as part of the natural environment.

It is well to recall, however, the great struggles over enclosure of commons in earlier centuries, which were contested not in sparsely populated upland regions, but in the midland region of highly productive farming. The lands fought over were not marginal rough-grazing commons at the edges of a parish but were the whole of the main productive fields around a settlement, which were, to use the seventeenth-century terms, "lying open" and "used in common". My study has centred on an area typical of the claylands of this region, the market town of Lutterworth and the three dozen villages round it which form the southern corner of the county of Leicestershire. I have analysed in detail the growth and redistribution of the population of these settlements and changes in their agrarian economy.

The workings of the English peasant farming system are well known. Use of the land of a parish was typically arranged as a three-year rotation on three open fields, the white corn field (wheat, rye and barley), the peas field (peas and oats) and the fallow field (for resting the arable). Of the two main labours in the fields one was the raising of corn crops on the furlongs of lands (areas of ground cultivated in strips): each farmer had rights over his individual lands scattered across the parish but the decisions about

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ploughing, sowing and harvesting were made communally and the operations were undertaken working shoulder to shoulder in the fields. The other activity was the common grazing of the fields by the flocks of sheep and herds of cattle. Most of the Midlands was densely populated from the early Middle Ages onwards, with a village every couple of miles, and tillage was so extensive that there remained very little waste for commons outside the area of the arable fields. So the two activities in common, arable and grazing, were superimposed and it is possible to identify the conflicting demands made on the same ground. The farmer's holding was very far from giving him exclusive ownership of his lands measured in acres of surface area. The measure was the "yard land", which I prefer to think of as a "bundle of rights", mainly his rights to raise crops and his rights to graze animals, all regulated by communal decisions. The system was a cooperative undertaking that involved most of the village population in raising the essentials of life and distributing them. Much of the labour employed was rewarded in kind rather than in money, while surplus products that could be sold for cash were corn crops and wool from the sheep.

The common use of the land was only one aspect of the peasant economy of the village. The roles of the village miller, common baker and common alehouse-keeper were all embedded in the customary economy, ensuring distribution of provisions. The miller took his toll from the corn brought to him for grinding and therefore had flour to sell to those who had no share in the corn crops. The baker took his reward in the form of a portion of the dough brought to his oven for baking and was therefore able to sell loaves to those with no flour of their own. Likewise the village carpenter and smith, shoemaker and weaver would all be working on materials not belonging to themselves. Even if not occupied directly in farming, all such people doubtless turned out alongside the rest of the villagers to work in the fields at harvest time.

In the late fifteenth century, following the fall in the population of England in the later Middle Ages and the contraction of its economy, tillage was abandoned in a few of the parishes and the village communities expired. Their land was taken in hand and continued to be used as extensive sheep pasture grounds by the lord of the manor, who either occupied it himself or let it to a tenant. Such desertions are well recorded, as they were a cause for alarm to the government, being seen as a diminution in the numbers of subjects of the Crown and therefore to be prevented. These "ancient enclosures", amounting to 15% of the Lutterworth area, however, did not radically alter the structure either of the farming economy or, apart from the ring-fence around them and the absence of tillage, of the countryside. Typically a village was reduced to one manorial household, with its resident retainers and dependent staff, and what had been the common use of the fields was reduced to one farm at a low level of productivity. The main source of income was the lord's store flock of sheep, yielding the same fine short-staple wool as the village flocks. In a region with few opportunities for natural water transport, the main export out of the Midlands had for centuries been wool.

Apart from this, however, the sixteenth century saw villages increase in both the number and material wealth of their inhabitants, increases which were spread fairly evenly throughout their communities. Some farmers, however, were able to pull

themselves ahead of their neighbours by making use of grazing rights in enclosed pasture grounds on nearby manors to help them fatten sheep and cattle for the market and engage in dairy production. Towards the end of the century there was increasing pressure for enclosure by farmers engaged in this same market and government intervention was mostly ineffective in preventing it. The reaction by the peasantry against unscrupulous enclosers culminated in the last great peasant uprising in England, the Midland Revolt of 1607, the local focus of which was the market town of Lutterworth, where the final enclosure of the adjoining parish of Cotesbach was in dispute. It is clear from the grievances expressed that enclosure was still seen mainly as causing depopulation by converting arable lands to pasture and so threatening the supply of bread-corn. The Revolt was condoned by John Moore, the rector of the nearby enclosed village of Knaptoft. In his published preaching against 'the tyrannous dealing of inclosers and needless overthrowers of tillage' he equated enclosure with 'turning commons into pastures, and tilled fields into closing . . . for cattle'.

The next fifty years saw an irrevocable swing in government opinion in favour of a more commercial use of the land. The key word was "improvement" and the encloser's improvement was assumed to contribute as much to the common good as it did to his own profit. Enclosure was seen as inevitable and merely needed regulation to prevent the worst abuses. Perhaps this is the reason for the phase of enclosure leading up to the English Civil War and beyond having been at times overlooked or discounted. In the case of the Lutterworth district, however, it certainly made a great difference to the local landscape, involving eleven of the villages and accounting for one quarter of the total area of land. Beyond this I have identified clear differences emerging between the two types of village, those that did enclose and those that retained their open fields, which help explain why this phase of enclosure did not continue.

There is a rare eye-witness account of the mid-seventeenth century enclosures in the area of my study, a pamphlet controversy between two local parsons. John Moore, like his father, was rector of Knaptoft; but he was also appointed to the Rectory of Lutterworth in the place of an ejected Royalist. In May 1653 he made an impassioned attack on enclosures in two sermons preached at the "lecture" in his market town, which he published as *The Crying Sin of England, Of not Caring for the Poor. Wherein Inclosure, viz. such as doth unpeople Townes, and uncorn Fields, is Arraigned, Convicted, and Condemned by the Word of God.* ["Town" included what we would now call a village.] This prompted a pamphlet denying the necessary connexion between enclosure and both depopulation and the end of tillage. By 1656 each side had published three pamphlets. Here we can read, expressed in vigorous seventeenth-century language and justified in biblical, logical, legal and husbandry terms, the timeless arguments for and against economic development, all written by two men personally involved in the changes. Moore took the lead in a county-wide campaign against the evils of enclosure, which involved him in person taking three petitions to London. His antagonist was Joseph Lee, the rector at Cotesbach, where he farmed the enclosed glebe land. His family farm too was also in the area, in the village of Catthorpe, the final enclosure of which he was at pains to justify.

Moore's railing against enclosure follows in his father's and in the sixteenth-century tradition. He has even been dismissed as a 'ghost from the past' launching an 'ineffective and outmoded diatribe against greed'. It is, however, worthwhile to examine in detail his testimony against the facts of what did transpire. I have transcribed below the main passage from his first pamphlet that sums up his campaign and I quote from the prolonged dispute with Lee.

Moore characterized 'the unsociable, covetous, cruel brood of those wretches, that by their Inclosure do unpeople Towns, and uncorn fields' as "make-beggars", 'that care not how many Beggars they make, so themselves may be Gentlemen; nor how many poor they make, so themselves may be rich.' He started from what he saw as the strengths of common-field husbandry and went on to dramatize the plight of the different layers of the village communities being displaced by enclosure, namely (1) the tenants (farmers with fully equipped mixed farms), (2) the cottagers (either smallholders or people whose rights over the fields were limited to grazing for house cows) and (3) the children of both (which included apprentices and servants in husbandry).

1. Tenants

'Truly it would make a charitable heart bleed to come now into our Markets, where we are now so busy upon such Inclosures, in Leicester-Shire; where the Market is full of enquiry, and complaint of such Tenants to all they meet, "Can you help me to a farm, or a little land to employ my team? I am discharged, and if I sell my Horses, and Cattle, I shall never get a team again, or so many Milk-cows to maintain my families. Alas, all my money will be spent, that I shall sell them for, ere I shall hear of any land to be set [to be leased to a tenant]."'

Why were fully-equipped mixed farmers having to leave their holdings? The main economic reason was that traditional common-field husbandry was now facing competition in the market from a more efficient system of production. In the 1620s there was a collapse in the demand for the fine wool from the flocks of the small sheep that grazed both the open fields and the ancient enclosures. The manorial pasture flocks that occupied the latter were sold up and the improving farmers were able to move onto these grounds and lease areas of them for private tillage. The corn crops grown for short periods in the extensive closes here took advantage of the soil's raised fertility and returned yields seriously higher than those from the common husbandry on the lands in the open fields. The result of this "up-and-down husbandry", whether on old enclosures or new, was that many ordinary peasant farmers now found that they could buy bread-corn in the local markets cheaper than it cost them to raise it themselves and that the price they could get for their own corn, the main product they could take to market, did not repay them for the labour they had put into raising it. In Lee's words 'the tilling of Inclosed grounds makes corn so plentiful, and by that means so cheap, that they are not able, at those rates, to maintain their charge of tillage in the Common-fields.'

2. Cottagers

"'And now alas", saith the poor Cottier, "there is no work for me; I need not be thrust out of the Town, I must be gone where I may get my living, and if I can get no house else where, I, and mine must starve.'"

A villager with a smallholding (of one yard land or less) was in great difficulty. He had no team of horses and there was now little to be made from his grazing rights for sheep. The only regular source of income should have been from the corn grown on his few lands. The depression of local corn prices, however, resulted in what Lee quotes as 'the maxim of the husbandman, That he that gives more Rent for his Land than the Hay and Commons are worth, hath but a hard bargain: his labour and charge in dressing seeds and inning, amounting to near as much as his Crop is worth.' Thus the most important right in the open fields remaining to him was the grazing of his house cows and there was therefore little to distinguish him from the cottager with no smallholding. As Moore complained, enclosures were turning farmers into cottagers and cottagers into beggars. The cottager's main involvement in the village, however, was his role as labourer undertaking the endless tasks in the fields, for which he was rewarded either in the distribution of produce or by cash payments. When tillage ceased in his village, the whole basis of his livelihood disappeared and he could only seek work as a landless, unattached wage-labourer.

Some credence has been allowed to the professed fairness of enclosures by this time in compensating cottagers for the loss of their grazing rights. It was usual to allow a plot of two acres for a cow-pasture. In many cases this was allotted not to the cottager himself but to the farmer whose farm the cottage belonged to. Lee would have such cottages 'left to the owners discretion, when they grow void, either by the decease, or voluntary departure of the present inhabitants . . .', when the plot would become the owner's property. In any event two acres are quite inadequate and where a cottager may formerly have been able to keep a cow running with the common herd, he was not necessarily able to afford to keep one on his own. Accordingly the dozen acres set aside as the "Poor's Plot" in the mid-century enclosure agreements should not be seen as generous compensation in the form of a resource for their use so much as a property that would be let to provide an income for the overseers of the poor. Lee made it clear that this was the case in his village of Catthorpe. Besides, as Moore protested 'what will this do when they have taken away their whole trade of maintenance for themselves and families?'

3. Children

'But now in such inclosed Towns, where there were wont to be kept 30, 40, 50 servants, there is not above three, or four. Hence the droves of poor children, when they are reproved for begging, are complaining, "We would willingly work, if any would set us on work."'

The common fields were not only the workplace for the villagers but also the school for their children. Through apprenticeship as servants in husbandry, whether formally engaged or not, they learnt the skills they needed by practice among their families and neighbours. Lee optimistically asserted that in his own village the maid-servants would not decrease in number but that the ten men-servants and shepherds might only fall to six or seven. Moore's accusation against such enclosers, however, was that 'their very project' was 'to famish the poor', to bring under control the settlement by poor in the parish. As one of the inhabitants of a local village who were 'hot upon such inclosure' put it, 'The poor increase like fleas, and lice, and these vermine will eat us up unless we

inclose'. 'And surely', Moore added, 'it was plain dealing, for without question he spoke the sense of most of the rest.'

The intellectual device by which seventeenth-century enclosure was justified was to distinguish between improving enclosure and depopulating enclosure and to deny the necessary connexion. In the broader context the enclosed regions cited as not having suffered depopulation were counties like Kent, Essex, Somerset and Devon, where the agrarian economy was patently different from common-field husbandry of the midland claylands. Joseph Lee is the witness most frequently quoted as having proved the case for this dissociation within the context of the Midlands. The core of his closely reasoned vindication of enclosure has been taken to be that he compiled impressive lists of Leicestershire villages which had been enclosed within the previous fifty years without depopulation and without decay of tillage. Moore exposed (and I have confirmed) the deceptions involved in these misleading lists 'stuffed so full of levity and untruths'. 'Surely they may make men as soon believe there is no sun in the firmament as that usually depopulation and decay of Tillage will not follow inclosure in our Inland Counties. We see it with our eyes: it is so.'

Lee insisted that the present enclosures would not necessarily lead to loss of inhabitants; but the facts are that they did. Moore's railing against the depopulating effect of enclosure follows his father's; but he was well aware that what was now involved was not complete desertion so much as a redistribution of population between the two types of village, out from those that enclosed and in to those that retained their open fields: 'But woeful experience tells us, a short time forced all the Tenants and Cottagers out of most of those places into the open-fielded Towns to seek for a livelihood where they can find it, to the great oppression of those Towns.'

As to decay of tillage, Lee was not so confident; but felt he did not need to be. After declaring that raising corn on old enclosed grounds was far more efficient, he was for leaving the decision whether to continue tillage after enclosure to market pressures. The facts are, however, that for village farmers who succeeded in enclosing their fields, the victory was a hollow one. After enclosure ordinary mixed husbandry there ceased completely. Not only that, but the customary basis for all the other village occupations evaporated. The result was that the range of economic activity in these village communities suddenly contracted. In Lee's words, 'Husbandry is the fundamental prop and nutriment of the Common-wealth; therefore this calling being in decay many ways . . . all other trades depending thereon suffer and are impoverished.'

This was a classic case of the dispossession of peasantry by market forces. Such villages became villages of the "close" type and all the farmers in them lost out: the smaller ones lost their livelihoods and the larger ones became owners of grazing farms which they had no means of tilling for themselves, whether for corn crops or for improvement of the pasture. By now some of the corn they bought in the local market may well have been raised on the soil of their own village, but by outsiders.

My analysis confirms Moore's identification of the victims of the changes so far as the villagers in the enclosing villages were concerned. Who were the principal agents in promoting the changes, his "make-beggars"? As enclosure could raise the capital value of land instantly, reputedly doubling or even trebling it, it might be assumed that they were unscrupulous lords of manors and gentry landowners in pursuit of "filthy lucre". There are certainly examples of enclosure at this time that greatly advanced the capital wealth of the lord of the manor who owned most of the village and also of the rector of the church, especially if he could convert into private land not only his glebe farm but also his right to tithes. Both Moore and Lee, however, were aware that the impetus was coming from within the local economy, from the village farmers themselves. In dealing with the farmers as his first layer of victims in the passage quoted above, Moore calls them "tenants"; but he ends by saying that the farms of freeholders were involved too. Lee's own village of Catthorpe was owned by eight freeholders and five or six cottagers, also freeholders. Lee had a tenant on his family 2¾ yard land farm and only one owner had two tenanted farms. In my own village of Ashby parva, the whole parish of which was enclosed in 1665, nearly all the three dozen parties to the enclosure agreement were freeholders resident in the village and nobody can be seen to have exercised any manorial influence. It seems that rather than suffering oppression from landlords the villagers were surrendering to a new economic reality: they could no longer continue with the old system of husbandry.

So far the two types of village, those that enclosed and those that retained their open fields, have been treated separately, in order to contrast them. Moore and Lee, however, were also aware of the cross-influence between the two beyond the redistribution of population. Moore complained of enclosing farmers renting holdings in neighbouring open-field villages. The increased rents they were able to pay were ousting the poorer tenants there too and turning them into cottagers.

To this Lee retorted by citing common-field farmers renting enclosed grounds: 'Those that live where the fields lying open are used in common become tenants themselves, and rent inclosed grounds round about them, . . . that they may be better able to maintain their own families, and manage their tillage in the common fields with more advantage; for which inclosed grounds, in that respect, they can afford to give greater rents, than they that live only upon inclosure can do.'

My examination of the farming economy of the area has demonstrated that this last type of farmer was without doubt the most important economic force in the area. While the villagers confined to the new-enclosed villages may have owned private land for exploitation, they did not have the horse teams or the labour force to exploit it themselves. The real power lay with the new breed of improving open-field farmers with heavy horses for ploughing up enclosed grounds and wagons for transporting their high-yielding crops to market. Lee himself cited one man who 'living himself where fields lying open are used in common, doth take to rent off other men, in other places, grounds inclosed to the value of £2,000 per annum'.

To look back over the two centuries of change in terms of both land use and territorial expansion, it can be seen that the early enclosures started with the dying out of the common-field husbandry of whole villages and it was over a century before the resulting pasture grounds could be sub-divided and improved by up-and-down farming. The open-field farming system, meanwhile, had always allowed scope for such variation of land use within the three-year rotation; but as the population increased in the later sixteenth century and greater demands were made on all the land simultaneously for both tillage and grazing, the distinction between permanent arable and permanent pasture hardened. The seventeenth century enclosures, on the other hand, involved taking all these steps in one generation and also breaking down the distinction – but this time on the fields of living village communities.

In the villages that enclosed, the economic differentiation within the community was disastrous in that it resulted in dispossessions and expulsions. Things were hardly better, however, in the villages that retained their open fields. The improving farmers there could take advantage of the wide range of economic activity in these "open" type villages. They made the greatest demands on the resources of the fields, their livestock being bigger and more profitable. They had control of the common flock of sheep and therefore of its folding of the arable lands. The smallholders could make little profit from their few lands in the fields or from their grazing rights for sheep. Cottagers' cows were restricted to grazing the worst land at the edge of the parish.

Lee wrote with confidence that the new techniques of production being adopted by the improving farmers would sweep away the problems that had been building up since the 1620s. He was blind to the fact that it was these techniques that were, on the contrary, aggravating the problems, in that their "success" depended on exploiting the poverty of the labourers who were being severed from their peasant roots.

We can now see why this phase of enclosure came to an end. The improving farmers had no intention of dismantling the bases from which they operated their large-scale arable farms. The fields of their own villages remained open; but the farming in common on the fields no longer served the whole community in common. At the top of the economy, the improving farmers, capitalists producing primarily for the market, had deserted the peasant community. At the bottom were the landless and unattached and poor that could be exploited as wage-labour. In the middle the peasant common-field farming of a restricted kind continued. This was all that was left, eventually to be snuffed out painfully in the later eighteenth century by the "parliamentary" phase of enclosure.

The enclosures of the seventeenth century, and indeed the changes to the remaining open-field villages, were not achieved without struggles, not only government intervention but also local quarrels. To Moore's three categories of victims of the make-beggars, he added a fourth as an extra, 'all those that shall stand in their way to hinder their uncharitable, yea unjust designs', against whom they bring 'multiplicity of Law Suits, Actions of Trespass, for nothing, or at least for trifles, as for coming over their ground'. He returned more than once to his personal knowledge and experience of such 'multiplicities of trivial Law suits in common Law and Chancery, threatening they will not

leave them a shift to their backs, nor a cow to their pail' and could have given 'a large Catalogue of the unjust vexations of such Righteous ones'. Such minor disputes would no doubt in the past have been settled within the community; they were now being taken by villagers to higher law courts to force the issue. This is a reminder that decision-making, as in most "primitive" societies, was naturally by consensus or, to use Lee's term, by "joint consent". In the eighteenth century a majority decision, either three-fourths or four-fifths, was accepted as sufficient to compel enclosure. In the seventeenth, however, the final enclosure of Cotesbach had been held up by two cottagers and of Catthorpe by one man with only grazing rights for seven sheep. In 1669 the advocate of improving farming John Worlidge (who had consulted Lee's work) wrote 'Of the great Benefits and Advantages of Enclosing Lands'. Like Lee before him, he was impatient with such 'general Obstruction' to progress, 'For the remedy whereof, a Statute to compel the Minor party to submit to the Judgement and Vote of the Major . . . would be very welcome'.

I have called the open-field farm holding a "bundle of rights". It might be more helpful to define it as a "bundle of rights and obligations" to cover also the network of shared and overlapping customs of cooperation and support, which concerned not only the farming system for winning a living from the land but the whole of the peasant village community, even to the support for its poor and needy.

I have read the six pamphlets of Moore and Lee repeatedly for the details they yield about the local husbandry. Perhaps I should now step back to appreciate their overall moral controversy. Moore's sermons started as a diatribe against greed. He dealt with Christ's question 'And who is my neighbour?', with Solomon's proverb 'The poor is hated even of his own neighbour: but the rich hath many friends' and with the ultimate judgement to be expected 'for not caring for the poor' of all kinds. He set out 'to plead the Cause of the Poor and Needy, against these Oppressors' that he characterised as make-beggars. Seeing the way that enclosures could be forced through without consensus of the community being arrived at and seeing the way that the surviving open fields were no longer used truly in common, is it possible that his outburst bears witness to the agrarian revolution of the seventeenth century having involved a fundamental change in attitudes, a break-down of values in the way neighbours could treat each other, making way for capitalist exploitation? It certainly looks as if he was observing the web of obligations within the community being dissolved by market forces.

At the beginning of the seventeenth century England was dependent on the import of vital corn supplies. During the century the English Civil War was fought against the background of the "English Revolution", which was primarily an agrarian revolution involving the commercialisation of farm production. By the end of the century England was an exporter and English farming, already exhibiting some of the characteristics of a developed industry, had been transformed into the foundation on which the first Industrial Revolution was to build.

Lee, like other advocates of improvement, was content to appeal to the profit motive and to maximum efficiency, trusting the "trickle-down" theory that increased production would deal with any problems of poverty: 'The greatest advantage to the Common-wealth, that can be raised out of land, is then, when it is imployed unto that use especially, for which it is fittest, and in such manner, that the greatest proportion of profit may be raised, with the least expence of charge.'

Moore, on the other hand, was painfully sensitive to "the tragedy of the common fields" that was unfolding before his eyes. In many villages the commons were being snatched from the people by enclosure and even where they remained open they no longer supported the traditional husbandry as common to the whole community. Well did he pray 'GOD SPEED THE PLOUGH' and cry to Lee and other make-beggars 'Where are those every year's crops, and all those Tenants, Cottiers, and servants that were wont to be kept there? Let them answer this question!'

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The Crying Sin of England, Of not Caring for the Poor. Wherein Inclosure, viz. such as doth unpeople Townes, and uncorn Fields, is Arraigned, Convicted, and Condemned by the Word of God, (1653) by John Moore, Minister of Knaptoft in Leicestershire, pp.8-14

["Town" included what we would now call a village.]

I shall (God willing) hold out these to the World to be notorious Make-Beggars, as woeful experience, and my whole Country of Leicester-Shire, with most of the Inland Counties can witness with me. Question many of our Beggars, that go from door to door, with wife and children after them, Where they dwell, and why they go a begging. Alas master, (say they) we were forced out of such a Town when it was inclosed, and since we have continued a generation of Beggars. When we take a view of the multitude of poor in Market Towns, and fielden Towns, we see how these poor wretches were driven out of their hive, their honey taken away (I mean their trade of ploughing) by such inclosure, and glad were they to find an old house any where to put their heads in, where they might have any employment to keep themselves, and family alive.

But to deal punctually with them (for they are ashamed of their make-beggar trade) I must charge them home. They make four sorts of people Beggars: first the Tenant. Secondly the Cottier. Thirdly, the children of both. Fourthly, all those that shall stand in their way to hinder their uncharitable, yea unjust designs. But they will plead, it's besides their intention to make beggars. Answer, It may be, it is not the end of the workman, but sure I am, it's the end of the work of such inclosure. I shall now proceed to my charge. For the three first sort they make Beggars. I shall begin with them first, and so come to the fourth.

And here for a ground work we must lay this undeniable truth: viz. that the great Manufacture and Trade of Leicester-Shire, and many (if not most) of the Inland Counties, is tillage. It's the plough whereby Tenants, Cottiers, and their children were set to work, & lived very happily, and comfortably, before there was so much of such Inclosure: Other Counties have other Manufactures and trading for the commonalty, we tillage, and the plough, whereby we breed multitudes of hard men, and horses for the service of the Common Wealth, if need be; whereby we also send forth abundance of all manner of corn, and grain, and peas-fed cattle to the City to victual our shipping at Sea, and to Countries round about us: all fed with the Plough in the common Fields.

First, they make Beggars of Tenants upon such Inclosure, for the Tenant forthwith is discharged of tillage, and farm, to seek a living he knows not where. Truly it would make a charitable heart bleed to come now into our Markets, where we are now so busy upon such Inclosures, in Leicester-Shire; where the Market is full of enquiry, and complaint of such Tenants to all they meet, 'Can you help me to a farm, or a little land to employ my team? I am discharged, and if I sell my Horses, and Cattle, I shall never get a team again, or so many Milk-cows to maintain my families. Alas, all my money will be spent, that I shall sell them for, ere I shall hear of any land to be set.' And in some Towns there is fourteen, sixteen, or twenty Tenants discharged of ploughing, all in this sad condition, besides many other teams, and farms of free-holders laid down in the same Towns.

And herein is the misery of the Tenant the greater, Those that have thus uncorned the said Towns, and turned all into pasture, and discharged their Tenants, these thus inclosed wretches become Tenants themselves, and rent land in the open fields round about them, or near unto them, to maintain their own families with corn, and their horses with feeding, for which land they give (being able to pay it out of their inclosed grounds) excessive rates, which if the poor Tenant should give, he and his must forthwith come to beggary. So that they do not only turn these poor Tenants out of inclosed Towns, but also rent those farms and that land in common fields, which the poor Tenants else might have rented at an easier rate; so that in the conclusion most of these Tenants become Cottiers.

And now in the second place, we shall truly shew you how they make Cottiers Beggars. In these inclosed Towns in laying down the plough, and taking away the crop of corn, how many crops do they rob the poor Cottier of? This poor man had a crop and income in every tilth of the plough . . . ; he had his income in the manuring, weeding, mowing, inning, gleaning, and threshing of the corn. 'And now alas', saith the poor Cottier, 'there is no work for me; I need not be thrust out of the Town, I must be gone where I may get my living, and if I can get no house else where, I, and mine must starve.' And hence it comes to pass, that the open fielden Towns have above double the Number of Cottiers they had wont to have, so that they cannot live one by another, and so put the fielden Towns to vast expences in caring for those poor, that these Inclosures have made: and what enquiring every where is there of these poor Cottiers (after the Town is inclosed) to get an house in any place, where they may have work?

Thirdly, such inclosures make Beggars of the children both of Tenants, and Cottiers; the children of both usually become servants to the husbandman, and brought up at the plough, &c. But now in such inclosed Towns, where there were kept 30, 40, 50 servants, there is not above three, or four. Hence the droves of poor children, when they are reproved for begging, are complaining, 'We would willingly work, if any would set us on work.'

In brief, is it not palpable, that the main inducement to such inclosure is filthy lucre, and to be rid of Tenants, Poor, and Servants? So far are they from caring for the poor, and in stead of bringing them into their houses, to rid them of their houses. As for example,

they being hot upon such inclosure in a Town I am well acquainted with, One of the inhabitants gave this reason why they must do it, in these words viz. The poor increase like fleas, and lice, and these vermine will eat us up unless we inclose: and surely it was plain dealing, for without question he spake the sense of most of the rest. But they will plead, when we inclose, we give somewhat to the poor. . . This they say, not that they care for the poor. . . They talk much of the poor, but they do nothing to the purpose in respect of that they rob them of: and usually they give to the poor with one hand, and take it away with the other, and their gratuity usually, as it reacheth but a few, and in some small trifle; so it lasteth but for a while. For depopulation comes by degrees, and the next generation usually knows neither Tenant, nor Cottier in such inclosed places, for Towns we must call them no longer.

Aye, but they plead further, we get a great deal of corn in pasture grounds. I grant they may get five, or six crops, once in thirty, or forty years: but where are those every years crops, and all those Tenants, Cottiers, and servants that were wont to be kept there? Let them answer this question.

Aye, but yet they have another Plea, Albeit this inclosure, there is now abundance of Corn, and that very cheap too . . . It's no thanks to them that we have plenty . . . But if the Lord should slack his hand but a little, and with-hold this more than usual increase of Corn from us; it is such inclosure would make it a flat famine; as within these few years, what crying for bread, and complaining in our streets of such inclosure? If then, what will become of us now? Since when there hath been so much inclosed, and even at this present they are so mad upon it, as though it was their very project one time or other to famish the poor.

But I proceed to the fourth sort, which they make beggars, and they are those honest hearts, who out of a tender conscience take so much care for the poor, as they dare not comply with them in their uncharitable designs, nor consent to such inclosure: Against these they fret and storm, and tell them in plain terms, they will undo them, and make them beggars; and so they do indeed, in bringing multiplicity of Law Suits, Actions of Trespass, for nothing, or at least for trifles, as for coming over their ground, &c. and vex them all with long tedious Suits in Chancery, to force them to do against their consciences; which they have brought to pass too often times: upon which some Parties have grown distracted, and others forced thus to consent, have never lived a comfortable hour after all the days of their lives. Oh this is cruel Oppression, and not to be suffered in a land of Uprightness, and yet is done in the face of the Sun. Alas, how many amongst us are now persecuted in this manner, because they would keep faith and a good Conscience pure, and unspotted, both before God and man; and are threatened to be undone utterly, except the Lord raise them up as Deliverers; for which I bow my knees to the father of our Lord Jesus Christ.