(To R.G. Procter, Cracoe Nov. 1927)

MANOR (Township of Rilston)

A YORKSHIRE TOWNSHIP (Rilston)

Its Enclosure and subsequent agricultural development by C.V. Dawe M.Com.

The township selected for the purpose of this paper is that of Rylstone near Skipton in the West Riding. It is on the Limestone Series and is from 400 to 1250 feet above sea level. A convenient point from which to commence is the year 1603 when a survey was made of Rylstone Manor, before being granted, in the 2nd or 3rd year of James I, to Francis Earl of Cumberland. This manor then contained 1,010 acres 10 poles, it received “old rents” to the value of £68.14.2 and had a clear yearly value of £139.17.8. At fifteen years’ purchase its fee simple was £3128.17.6.

This manor previously belonged to one Richard Norton who took part in the “Rising of the North” 1569 which had as its object the re-establishment of the Roman Catholic religion in England, making Mary queen once more. As a result of his activity in this rising, which was led by the Earls of Northumberland and Westmorland, Norton was attaindered and his lands became forfeit to the Crown.

The township and manor were practically co-extensive. The demesne was about 400 acres, and the remaining 610 acres were divided into 43 tenements, some of two oxgangs, others of less. An oxgang averaged from 12 to 13 acres.

The greater part of the land was unenclosed at this period except for some meadows round the cottages. One of the fields called Town Field, and lying in the valley bottom, contained all the arable land of the township. The rest of the land was fell land, that is to say, pasture land of varying quality upon the hillsides. Above these pastures, which were then held in common, lay the moors upon which the villagers had unstinted common rights.

The villagers were all tenants at will, although they received from the lord of the manor, verbal leases for life. There were no freeholders or cottagers. Fines were arbitrary but no heriots were paid, the tenement usually being granted to the eldest son or daughter of a deceased tenant.

A few leases for very long periods were granted in the early 17th century in this district, one of which is given here in some detail. The lease was granted in 1624 by nineteen yeomen of the neighbouring manors of Thorpe and Linton, to one named Anthony Richardson, whereby the latter leases several parcels of land for 6000 years at a rental of fourteen pence, payable in equal portions on the feast of Saint Martin the Bishop in winter, and at Pentecost. A payment of £32 at or before the sealing and delivering of the document was first necessary. The total area so leased was 7½ acres which had been used and enjoyed by them and their predecessors from time immemorial, for the keeping and maintaining of a common bull.

Under this lease Anthony Richardson “at his own proper costs and charges on this side and before the feast of St.Martin next”, agrees to “buy procure of get one good able substantial and sufficient bull”, and at all times “during and unto the end of the said term of 6,000 years” shall keep and maintain one good able substantial and sufficient bull within the said town “for the use of all the other 19 yeomen”. Any eight of them could, at any time demand that he replace the old bull with a younger one at his own expense.

As far as Rylstone is concerned little enclosure took place until the 18th century, although in neighbouring manors Norton had made agreements with his tenants, allowing them to enclose certain parts, and in Queen Elizabeth’s reign considerable enclosures of the moors took place in those manors. In Rylstone the only lands enclosed by the latter part of the 18th century were those of the valley bottoms, but by the Act of eleven George III, authority was given for the enclosing of large areas of moor and fell land.

The enclosure Award dated 21st January 1772, which carries into effect the Act quoted, commences by saying that “there were within the township of Rylstone four undivided stinted pastures for the depasturing of cattle, called the North Moor, Longhill, Bark and Garforth Close containing by estimation 769 acres or thereabouts, and that by reason of the largeness of the said four stinted pastures, trespasses were frequently committed therin by persons turning cattle thereon who had no right to any of the said cattle gates, to the great damage and prejudice of the owners and proprietors thereof, and that the said four stinted pastures, in case the same were enclosed and divided amongst such owners and proprietors in proportion to the number of cattle gates, which they were respectively entitled to therein, would be capable of being cultivated and greatly improved, and rendered of much greater use benefit and advantage to them than the same were at that time”

There appears to be no doubt that while the trespasses referred to were the ostensible reason for the enclosures, the true reason is to be found in the rapidly increasing demands of the new manufacturing towns for food supplies, which, in the case now being considered, would consist of meat, milk, and dairy produce

Much road making had to be done in pursuance of the award, and roads had to be sixty feet in breadth between the fences, which were to be “good and sufficient stone walls six feet high”. The usual statement is made by the Commissioners that they have considered the quality and quantity of the land also the situation and contiguity of the lands of the proprietors. Allottees are to have full power on their allotments to cut trenches and divert streams for watering cattle, provided other persons be not prejudiced. Such cuts are to be made within three years. The neighbour of anyone wishing to drain his land shall make cuts or trenches to assist the drainage of his neighbour’s land.

The Award is concerned with 25 proprietors owning between them 316 cattle gates of which 50 were on Longhill, 86 on the bark, 176 on North Moor and 4 only on Garforth Close. The extent of these four stinted pastures were – North Moor 385 acres, Longhill 152 acres, Bark 229 acres, Garforth Close 11 acres. Though an analysis results in a varying acreage for an average cattle gate on each moor, it would appear that the proprietors had some idea of uniformity in calculating cattle gates, for the size may be put at between 2½ and 3 acres each. When, however, the commissioners made their allotments wide divergences in sizes of cattle gates are found. For example, in the Bark, a cattle gate varied from one to six acres.

Some of these cattle gates were freehold derived by grant from the Lord of the Manor, and some leasehold held under leases granted by George Earl of Cumberland, ancestor of the Duke of Devonshire. In the case of the Freehold allotments the minerals were intended to pass, but not in the case of leasehold allotments, nor of course, of any wastes unless the waste was held exclusively by the freeholders in common.

It may be if interest here to mention the importance, even today, of this point as evidenced in a recent dispute over two quarries on one of the Moors. The moor in question is known as Boss Moor and was the only one unstinted and therefore not held in cattle gates. According to evidence given in this dispute the herbage was held exclusively by the freeholders and was let at a private auction held each year in the vestry of Rylstone Parish Church, the rent being divided pro rata amongst the tenant farmers in the district. Entries in the township books show that the freeholders considered themselves the owners of the soil of Boss Moor and therefore claimed the ownership of the quarries with the consequent right to prohibit any persons from outside the township taking stone from them. In particular they claimed the right to prevent a man named Donkin from taking stone out of the township. He was contractor for the construction of the Winterburn Reservoir required by the Leeds and Liverpool Canal Co. to keep the canal adequately supplied with water at what is known as Summit Pool. In the end it was found that the freeholders had not the right of preventing stone going out of the township since they had, in earlier times, given permission for this to be done. The special grievance in this case seemed to be that Donkin was making use of a steam crane, employing 30 men, going much deeper, and removing very much larger quantities of stone than ever before, so that the customary cart road into the quarry was rendered useless.

In reviewing the above case it seems that the freeholders had dealt with the moor as their freehold in all respects, with the exception that they had not taken the coal and had not exercised the right of shooting. It seems that there had been at some time a grant from the Lord of the manor to the freeholders as tenants in common of Boss Moor with the reservation of coal and right of sporting.

The importance of these quarries should not be underestimated for the stone was much liked for building the houses and shippons or cow byres, several examples being still in existence. Arncliffe School was partly built from stone obtained on Boss Moor by the people themselves for home consumption and no charge was made by the Lord of the Manor.

The owners are directed to enclose and fence their allotments at their own expense within 14 months after the signing and sealing of the award, but are allowed to get stone for the fences from any part of the four pastures, and to do their own carting. Gaps are to be left in the new fences for 14 months (if necessary) for the convenient passage of cattle and carts. Fences adjoining highways are to be maintained for ever at the sole cost of the owner of that allotment.

That the question of rent restriction is not new, is borne out by the fact that the commissioners were given power to determine whether rents might be raised by an owner to his tenant occupying one of the allotments on a lease.

The Lord of the Manor’s rights to all seigniories, royalties and rents were not to be prejudiced in any way, neither were the tithes belonging to the Rectors of the Parish Church of Burnsall to be affected. In this connection it may be mentioned that no advantage seems to have been taken by the landowners of the district, of the opportunity afforded by the enclosure of redeeming the tithes on their lands, by allotting a piece of land as full recompense for them.

In June 1793, Benjamin Chambers, acting as agent for the Duke of Devonshire, made a valuation of the tithes in Rilstone, and his report is a good account of the district at that time:- “The Township of Rylstone is a chapelry within the parish of Burnsall. The Duke of Devonshire is Lord of the Manor and by far the greatest owner. The Duke’s Hall Farm called the demesne land contains about 500 acres and is said to be tithe free, but if it was not, there is no corn or plough land upon the farm this year. There is said to be £3-10-0 paid to the Rector of Burnsall out of the Corn Tithe, also 13/4 to the Rector of Linton.”

The tithe hay, or payment in lieu thereof, with the wool, lamb, and other small tithes are payable to the vicar of Burnsall, and this township is much like most of the townships in Craven, not at all proper for ploughland, as the corn will naturally grow sour and flaggy and very rarely get ripe, and when it does the oats are very husky and unkind. On the contrary there is no land more inclinable to grass, and that of the best quality, therefore no person who understands the situation of this country, the quality of the land and the local advantages, would suffer a tenant to plough or even break up the land at all. The mode of management for the tenants’ profit as well as the great improvement to the estates in general, is to drain the wet places, and lime upon the grass, which manure Craven abounds with, and of the best quality, then stock the hills with breeding cattle and sheep, and the valley (which is now much the case) with feeding cattle as stock bringing forward to maturity. (The corn tithe on oats was then 4/- to 5/- per acre.

The question of rents may now be considered. As the land became converted from arable to grass, tithes became lighter with the result that rents increased. Prospective occupiers preferred grassland to arable, partly because tithes were regarded as onerous, but chiefly because they received greater freedom in their farming operations when tenanting a grass farm. By the beginning of the 19th century about ¾ of the land was held under yearly tenancies, the remaining ¼ under leases varying in length from 3 to 21 years.

Changes in rent between the latter part if the 18th century and today are shown by the following details:-

A farm at Rylstone of 651 acres was rented for £201 in1788, namely at 6/2d per acre including the house. In 1848 this same farm yielded a rental of £435 or of 13/5d per acre; in 1880 £540 or 16/7d per acre. In 1900 this farm was increased to 786 acres and then gave a rent of £454 equivalent to only 11/7d per acre. By the recent Rent Restriction Act this rent has since been increased by 10% to £500 so that this farm today is rented at 12/9d per acre. It will be observed that the highest rental was obtained in 1880, and that since then there has been a decline which set in with the bad years of the “eighties”. The period of high rents may be stated to be between 1860 and 1880. Without going into too great detail the effect of the slump on rents may be seen by the fact that a farm of 156 acres of good land was rented in 1880 for £302; in 1881 for £270; in 1882, with 5½ acres more, for £284; in 1885 for £264; and in 1887 for £230. Another farm of 32 acres dropped £1 per acre in those 6 years. The rents of the “seventies” were so high, due to the boom in agriculture, that a contemporary land agent who had had wide experience said he did not know how tenants could make farming pay at the rents they were then paying. In 1874 34 acres of good land gave a rent of £85 while the same farm with an additional 6 acres gave in 1888 only £70 rent.

The purchase price of land in this district was high in the “sixties” and “seventies” and was partly due to the fact that Bradford merchants, who were then experiencing a period of prosperity, gave high prices for farms and estates. One farm was then purchased for £6,000, the occupier spent an additional £3,000 in improvements and repairs, and a few years ago this farm was bought by another for £4,000.

The rates on agricultural land, as distinct from buildings, have increased since 1562 from 1/2 in the £ to 2/7 in 1926. In this latter year Rylstone township had an annual net value of £2974 of which £1603 (full value) represented agricultural land and £1371 represented other hereditaments (not being agricultural land.)

An examination of the Census Returns shows that the population of this township has decreased more or less steadily since 1801. At that date the population was 177, in 1921 it was 118. The peak was reached in 1811 when there were 192 persons the lowest point was 107 in 1861. There are evidences that this township was once more industrialised even than today, for there are the remains of an old cloth mill, a corn mill, and of a row of cottages which were pulled down about 1850. A fairly large trade in wool was also carried on with Skipton which had a large warehouse for sorting and combing wool.

The wages of persons in Rylstone about 1800 are not easy to state with any degree of finality since there are several disturbing influences. In the first place there was no general regulation of wages such as the present Wages Board give, secondly, the Speenhamland system upset all previously known rates, and thirdly, a large proportion of the population were farmers on their own account, occupied tied cottages, or were boarded in the employer’s house.

Eden, in 1795, collected information concerning wages and found the average family wage throughout England to be 11/9 per week. The Yorkshire labourer was found to have the lowest wage. In the Report to the Board of Agriculture on Yorkshire in 1794 the average wages of agricultural labourers are put at 1/6d per day, say 9/- per week. There is considerable to show, however, that in the West Riding, wages were higher than elsewhere because of the attraction of the new manufacturing industries. It has been calculated that in Leeds about this time millwrights earned 18/- to 21/-, carpenters and masons 15/- to 18/-, day labourers 9/- to 12/-, journeymen clothiers 9- to 15/- per week and ploughmen £12 per annum with food and beer. A man servant earned about £10-10-0 per annum with board and washing, a woman servant £5-5-0.

Agricultural labourers, finding their own food, obtained from 2/- to 2/6 per day, almost double of new urban industries.

Wage rates taken from the account books of the Lord of the Manor for 1772 are as follows:-

Carter £18-0-0 per annum live in

Housekeeper £36-10-6 “ board wages

Gardener £38-14-6 “

Housemaid £21-2-6 “

The hours of labour were from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. in summer, less about 2 hours for meals, and in winter from light to dusk. A considerable amount of labour about this time was done by the piece and piece rates were quite usual, especially for the very considerable amount of walling, hedging and ditching carried out in pursuance of the enclosure award. Possibly a few examples of such rates may be of interest:-

In 1800 – for road making with a wall 6’ 3” high on one side – the road to be cast and levelled 3½ yards broad – 12/6d per road inclusive.

In 1813 – Ploughing for turnips 3 times over £2-5-0 per acre. Ordinary ploughing from 12/6 to 15/- per acre.

In 1814 – Drain cutting at 10d. per rood of 7 yards forward 2 feet deep, 2 feet wide at top, and 14 inches at bottom.

A man with two horses, leading and harrowing at 7/- per day.

Making a wall 6 feet high, 3 feet wide at bottom, tapering to 3 inches at the top – 8/11 to 11/6 per rood of 7 yards. (stones free except for carting).

The cost of living in those days cannot easily be compared with that of today, but the following prices may give some indication:-

in 1794 Beef, mutton, veal and pork about 4½ per lb.

Butter 8¾d.

Wheat 8/- per bushel or 14/3 per cwt.

Oats 3/6 to 4/- per bushel or 9/4 to 10/8 per cwt.

in 1811 Mutton 7d. lb

Veal 1/- lb

Beef 7½d. lb

Butter 11d. lb

Wheat 9/- per bushel or 16/- per cwt.

Oats 5/6 “ “ “ 14/8 “ “

Tea 13/- per lb.

Bread – usually baked at home (say 1/- per gallon loaf)

The end of the 18th century was a period of enlightened outlook in agriculture generally, and because of the Napoleonic war and the growth of urban population, was a very profitable industry, Arthur Young estimating the profit at from 14% to 20% on capital. Breeds of cattle and sheep were greatly improved and agricultural produce of all kinds was cheap.

Between 1715 and 1765, however a period of general agricultural distress was experienced, which affected the district now being considered. In the spring of 1744 the agent of the Lord of the Manor reported that the weather had been so bad that the tenants were unable to plough or sow because of the wetness of the ground. He points out that most of the tenants are graziers laying out their money in providing stock for the summer, and that they cannot pay their rents because they suffered greatly through the last season, their stock in many instances producing little more than prime cost, so that they lost the grass and the interest on their money.

In 1793 a Skipton farmer told the Board of Agriculture that “turnips could not be grown here as they would not mature owing to it being such a wet climate”. This statement is not quite correct, since before this date turnips were grown for fodder, though not to any large extent.

Until a few years ago there was a small acreage of cereals grown, and the local farmers, through their co-operative requisite society, purchased a threshing machine which was hired out by individual farmers. Since the end of the war in 19118, however, the cereal acreage has declined almost to nothing, with the result that no one wished to use the thresher, and it was consequently sold. The chief energies of the township are concentrated in cattle rearing and fattening for Skipton market. There is a fair amount of sheep rearing carried out on the fells, but few cows are kept because of the distance from any large market. A number of small and dark cow byres, some dating from 1694, are still in existence on the hillsides, but are not now used for their original purpose. Much of the milk that is produced either goes for feeding calves or for butter, neither being very profitable.

A letter to the Board of Agriculture in 1793 from a man near Skipton says that he finds no material alteration in the past century or more. During the past 40 years, he says, there was a considerable portion in tillage and the ploughing was carried out by 4 or 6 men or 1 or 2 horses. The district was then famous for a herd of long horned cattle, particularly oxen, but since the introduction of Scotch cattle and grazing, the long horned and the tillage have been neglected. The landlords did not favour ploughing of the fine lands. Population was therefore low and corn prices high because not enough was grown.

In 1698 milk sold to retailers fetched 5½d. per gallon. It was retailed at 6½d. to 7d. Nearly a century later, in 1794 the retail price was 8d. to 9d. a gallon.

Few pigs and poultry are kept in Rylstone, although it would seem that a greater attention to both these classes of stock, in view of modern marketing methods and requirements, would be well rewarded, especially as they could be run in conjunction with the cattle.

Some prices for livestock in 1764 taken from a farmer’s account books are:-

7 Scotch beasts for £35 (all)

3 Indian cows for £15

8 Scotch sheep for £6

5 Spanish sheep for £2

20 Scotch oxen for £120

Some crop prices are as follows:-

A field of barley, nearly 3 acres, sold by tender in 1813 for £24-10-6 or about £8-4-0 per acre (say £12 or £14 per acre today). Another field fetched £9-10-4 per acre. In the same year 17½ acres of turnips were sold for £64 or about £3-14-0 per acre to be eaten upon the ground by sheep

Some retail prices of crops in 1811 are as follows:-

Hay seed 4¾. per peck

Seed oats 2/10d. per peck

Seed barley 4/9d. “ “

Beans for feeding £4 per quarter

Oats £2-4-0 “ “

Barley £2-17-0 “ “

Potatoes 5/6 to 6/- per sack

There remains to be considered the influence of the local railway upon the development of this township. The line, which was opened in 1902, is 8½ miles long, and runs from Skipton to Grassington, Rylstone being about halfway. The original estimate of £40,000 was almost doubled by the time it was completed. This Yorkshire Dales Railway, as it was called, has made the district much more accessible than previously. The line was originally proposed and desired by the agriculturists who thought that it would be of great advantage to them for the carriage of produce and livestock, but an investigation into the traffic returns at Rylstone station shows that practically the whole of the outward traffic consists of limestone from the neighbouring quarries at Swinden which goes first to Leeds and then to Middlesborough for use in the iron and steel industry there. The inward traffic consists mainly of coal, again for use in connection with the quarries.

The quantities of minerals need not be discussed here except that it may be mentioned that the post war depression in the iron and steel industry has had its effect upon this district and has, therefore, affected employment there. The railway, too, has felt the recent competition of road transport both in passengers and in farm produce, especially livestock. The imports of Irish and Scotch cattle come by rail either to Skipton or to Hellifield and then walk to Rylstone and neighbouring townships, so that the railway does not benefit greatly from the transport of agricultural produce to the district.

In conclusion I should like to express by sincere thanks to those who have so kindly given me any assistance within their power, and especially to Colonel W. Maude for placing both his private papers and his intimate knowledge of the district at my disposal; to Mr. R.G. Procter for the loan of the Award and maps; to Mr Downs for giving me full access to the records of Bolton Abbey and last but not least to Mr. Thompson who has elucidated many obscure points for me in the history of the township.

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